Worship Resources for March 17th, 2019—Second Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35 or 9:28-36 (37-43a)

Narrative Lectionary: Laborers in the Vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16 (Psalm 16:5-8)

Continuing on a theme of hope for the future, the Hebrew Scriptures selection in this season of Lent focuses on God’s promise to Abram in Genesis 15. At this point, Abram and Sarai are still childless, and their hope for the future is very bleak. Without an heir, there is no one to carry on their name or receive their inheritance. God promises that Abram will have descendants more numerous than the stars, and after Abram makes a sacrifice to God, God declares the land that Abram’s descendants will inherit.

Psalm 27 is a song of endurance and encouragement. Though enemies rise up, the psalmist declares their faithfulness to God. Even when they are surrounded, they will still sing praise. The psalmist pleads for God to answer them in their distress, and to not forsake them. “Teach me your way,” the psalmist calls out, and in the end, believes that there is still goodness to come. Take heart.

Paul writes in Philippians 3:17-4:1 to encourage the church in Philippi to live as an example of Christ by imitating him. Paul writes of those who live as enemies of the cross, whose “god is the belly.” Greed and lust are their downfall, but for those who imitate Christ, the citizenship in in heaven. For a church living under the reign of Rome, these are words of encouragement that the ways of the world are set on worldly things, but Christ is the one who will transform us. Paul encourages the church to remain faithful.

The first selection for the Gospel reading is Luke 13:31-35, in which some Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him. It’s a good reminder for us reading two thousand years later not to lump all Pharisees together. There were many who, while they may not have agreed with everything Jesus taught, did not want anything bad to come to him, either. Jesus laments over Jerusalem, the holy city, for the prophets of the people were often not listened to and sometimes killed there. Jesus sees himself in this line of prophets, as one who wanted to gather the people, to protect them like a mother hen, but he knows he will be rejected by the leaders as were other prophets.

The second selection is the Transfiguration, the Lectionary reading from two weeks ago. In Luke’s account of Jesus’ Transfiguration, Jesus has taken Peter, James, and John up the mountain with him to pray. They are “weighed down with sleep” but they experience Jesus’ clothes turning dazzling white, and the appearance of his face changed. Moses and Elijah also appear with him. However, in Luke’s account, the figures are leaving when Peter declares it is good to be there, and suggests making dwellings for all three of them (suggesting Peter wants the other two to remain). A cloud overshadows them, and Peter, James, and John are terrified. After the voice booms down from heaven that this is “my Son, my Chosen; listen to him,” they find Jesus alone, and they don’t say anything to anyone. In the continuing verses, it is the next day that they are met by a great crowd, and a desperate father looking for help for his son possessed by a spirit. Jesus appears to be angry at the “faithless and perverse generation” after his own disciples were unable to cast the spirit out. Jesus rebukes the spirit, heals the boy and gives him back to his father. While we don’t know why the disciples were unable to cast out the spirit, it seems that they had given up and left the father to fend on his own for help.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. In this passage, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who hires daily laborers for the vineyard—some early in the morning, some at noon, some at three, and some an hour before evening. However, at the end of the day, he has them paid all the same. Those who worked all day are not happy about it. The owner says, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong.” He then asks the question if they are envious because he is generous with what belongs to him. Jesus declares that the last will be first, and the first shall be last.

The psalmist declares in these few verses of Psalm 16 that God is the one who gives counsel and instruction. The psalmist keeps close to God, choosing God’s ways, and they know that God is the one who delivers them.

Waiting for God is often a theme in Lent and in our faith journey. Waiting for an answer to prayer. Waiting for hope in the midst of bad news. Wondering where God is, how God will see us forward when there seems to be no path. The scriptures tell us to wait, but we’re an impatient people. But in the end, God will see us through. In this season of Lent, God is with us as we travel the wilderness. And though we may want to avoid the rough patches, we still have to go through them. However, Christ has traveled this journey, and has seen the other side. We will make it through.

Call to Worship

When the shadows grow at the edge of the road,

 **O God, keep us steady, help us move onward.**

When the path is unclear, and fog settles in,

 **O God, help us to overcome our fears, and live in faith.**

When it becomes difficult to continue on,

 **O God, make Your presence known to us,**

Despite our weariness and our struggles,

 **O God, be with us, always.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Steadfast God, we confess that our courage is fleeting. Fear overtakes us; we become weary and overwhelmed. Renew our spirits, O God. Help us to lean on You, to find our strength in one another. Lift us up, and help us to lift up one another. Inspire us, O God, to keep moving on, despite what the world throws at us, despite our disappointments and shortcomings. For You are our Rock, our Strength, and Our Redeemer. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Lamentations 3:22-23)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; God’s mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning; great is God’s faithfulness.

Be renewed. Be inspired. Be hopeful. Be unafraid, for God loves you, God forgives you, and God is with you, always, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer

Creator God, there are so many more stars than what we can see, and their light is shining; we just haven’t seen it yet. The stars in front of us will burn out and fade from memory, but their light is shining now, and we behold it and are amazed. God, You have created what was, and You are creating what is new, and You create what will be. In all the worries and troubles of the now, may we remember with awe all that has been, and all that is to come, through You, the Great Connection, the Mystery, the Creator of the Universe. Amen.