Worship Resources for March 19, 2017—Third Sunday in Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Narrative Lectionary: Lost Sheep, Coin, Son, Luke 15:1-32 (Psalm 119:167-176 or vs. 176)

Soon after the people had escaped from Egypt, Moses was met with their complaining. There was no water for the people to drink where they camped, and Moses was frustrated. God told Moses to strike the rock at Rephidim, with the very staff he used to part the Nile, and water flowed. The people quarreled as to whether God was with them or not, but God provided for their needs once again.

Psalm 95 references Exodus 17, warning the people to not harden their hearts. The psalmist reminds the people that the whole earth belongs to God, for God made it. The psalmist calls for the people to come before God with humility to worship, and to not be like their ancestors, to challenge and quarrel with God when things don’t go right for them, for God has provided for all.

Paul reminds the church in Rome that God is with them in their suffering. In Romans 5:1-11, Paul states that we are justified through faith—that our suffering is not a punishment. Instead, suffering provides an opportunity to know God’s strength and produce endurance. Nonetheless, Paul is not stating our suffering is caused by God, but rather through suffering we do know God is with us and God can bring hope through our suffering, and hope will not disappoint us. For a church that faced persecution and uncertainty and no doubt suffering, these words of Paul encourage and lift up. Paul reminds them that God saved them even when they were sinners, for Christ died for all to bring reconciliation.

Jesus encounters the Samaritan Woman at the Well in John 4:5-42. Jews did not associate with Samaritans and men did not associate with women alone in public. Furthermore, the woman was unmarried and living with another man after being married five times. With all those cultural strikes against her, Jesus chooses to speak to her and to tell her of the living water found in him: the water of life that comes from the Spirit. She in turn goes and tells everyone what she has seen and heard, no longer afraid of cultural status or shame. The disciples, however, are clearly disturbed that Jesus was alone with a divorced Samaritan woman, but they don’t say anything. Instead, Jesus tells them that the fields are ripe for harvesting, using a similar metaphor for food that he used with the woman for water, that in Christ is the real sustenance, the real life.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Luke 15, and the three parables Jesus tells in response to some of the Pharisees and scribes complaining that Jesus was welcoming sinners and eating with them. While all deal with something or someone being lost and then found, the final parable shows how the Forgiving Father runs out the door to welcome the prodigal son home before he can even give his speech of repentance. The Forgiving Father is there the moment the son turns back. And the son who was always with the father has a really difficult time accepting all of this, and does not accept that he already knows the Father and can already rejoice and celebrate with him. In all three of these parables, the person who does the action of finding—the father, the woman, and the shepherd—are in many ways acting very ridiculous. It would be foolish to leave 99 sheep behind to find one lost lamb. It would be a waste of time to sweep the house looking for one lost coin when you already have the other nine—and even more of a waste to celebrate and spend money for finding one lost coin! And the father would already be facing the social stigma of having a son with a reputation for dissolute living, but he disregards social convention. This is how God’s extravagant love works: it defies social convention, undoes all we have learned, and embraces us when we aren’t worthy.

The love of God that we know through Jesus Christ is a foolish story: why would God give up the only Son? Why would God allow Jesus to die? Why would God send Jesus into the world when he knew he would die? God’s love is like that—ridiculously unconditional, to the point of Christ laying down his life for us so we might finally get how much God loves us, and what God is willing to do for us to end our own destructive, violent ways. For God does not seek vengeance, but rather, when Christ rose from the dead, he said, “Peace be with you; do not be afraid.” In Christ is the living water, the heavenly manna, the love that sustains us for eternity.

Call to Worship (from John 4)

Jesus says to us, “Anyone who drinks from this water will be thirsty again,”

**But those who drink of the water Christ give us will never be thirsty.**

The water that Christ gives us will become a spring of water,

**A spring gushing up to eternal life.**

We come before Christ, asking for this living water, so we may never be thirsty again.

**Jesus says we will be fed when we do the will of God.**

For the fields are ripe for the harvest,

**And we are sent forth, entering into the labor of God.**

**Come, let us worship God, who has called us to this work.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Living Water, we confess that we are often running on empty, feeling dry and drained, parched from the demands of the world. We confess that we turn to worldly ways of filling our needs, rather than seeking Your wisdom and guidance. Turn us to Your ways. Turn us to Your teaching. Turn us to Your work, to love our neighbor as ourselves, for in following Your commandments, we are fulfilled, renewed, and restored. In Your name, Water of Life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Justice flows like a mighty water; righteousness as an ever-flowing stream. Drink deep of the water of God, that gushes up into a spring of eternal life. Through this water know that you are born from above, given new life, and are sent forth. Through this water know that you are God’s beloved, and God is pleased with you. Go and share the good news of Christ’s love for the world. Amen.

Prayer

Searching God, You have sought us, pursued us when we have fled from You and Your ways, and found us when we were lost and wandering. We can never be far from You. Surround us with Your loving embrace when we feel distant and aloof. Enfold us in Your love when we feel lonely and abandoned. Embrace us in Your care when we feel forgotten. Remind us to reach out to one another, to share Your love, for we are Your embrace, Your love, Your caring heart in this world, and we are called to love one another. Amen.