Worship Resources for March 2, 2014—Transfiguration Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2 or Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

We read of Moses’ experience on Mount Sinai on this Transfiguration Sunday, as in the Gospel reading we will find echoes of that story in Jesus and the disciple’s experience on the mountain. Moses goes up on Mount Sinai to be with God and to receive the tablets of stone with the law and commandments. The glory of God settles like a cloud on the mountain—something mysterious, something we cannot see through—something we are veiled and shadowed from, but Moses is invited in, and Moses later reveals the law to the people.

Psalm 2 reminds the listeners that God is the one who rules. As kings plot, God laughs, for God is the one who rules. The psalmist sings of God setting a king in Zion, and warns the earthly kings to look to God and serve God, or see all of their plans fall to pieces.

Psalm 99 also sings of God as the one king of the world. God is the one who executes justice and watches out for the oppressed. God is the one who gave the law to Moses and Aaron and God is the one who judges over all.

2 Peter 1:16-21 echoes Psalm 2, which is echoed again in the baptism of Jesus as well as the Transfiguration. Jesus is called God’s Beloved Son, and we are called to be the light of the world. In this case, the writer calls upon the reader to reflect that Jesus is God’s beloved Son, and that this light will also be reflected in our hearts. Aaron was a priest, but Moses was also a prophet, and the writer eludes that we must be ready for Jesus to return and to understand this prophecy is not a matter of human understanding or interpretation. Because Jesus did not return as soon as many had expected, some were beginning to doubt and turn away. The writer is reassuring the listeners that human experience and understanding is limited, but Christ remains true, and will come again.

Matthew 17:1-9 is Matthew’s account of the Transfiguration story. The Transfiguration echoes the story of Moses upon Mount Sinai, with God’s glory coming like a cloud about them. Jesus’ appearance changes, and Moses and Elijah appear with him. Peter, and perhaps the other disciples with Jesus, doesn’t seem to understand what is going on, but that it is “good to be here.” In the next moment, it is almost as if God scolds them, thundering down and saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” But after they fall to the ground, Jesus touches them and says, “Get up, don’t be afraid. Just don’t tell anyone about this vision until after the resurrection.” They look up and Jesus looks as he did before, and Moses and Elijah and the cloud is gone. So what just happened? And why? Did they have a glimpse of the heavenly kingdom? Did they have a better understanding of who Jesus was, in relation to God? This passage takes place just after Jesus has asked them who they say he is, and after Peter has tried to rebuke him for talking about his death. Now they are given a glimpse of what is to come, but they still do not fully understand. Perhaps that is why Jesus told them not to tell anyone until after the resurrection.

The Transfiguration is a story we read every year, and we do not fully understand the story now. But what we are given is a glimpse—a glimpse—into a deeper, more fuller relationship with God. As Moses went up the mountain, enveloped by the cloud of God, so the disciples are included—and so we will be. As Jesus tells us in John’s Gospel that we are to be called servants no longer but we will be called friends, and as Moses spoke to God like one speaks to a friend, so we may draw into a deeper relationship with the Divine. As we prepare for Lent, may we seek a deeper understanding, as one has with a true friend.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 43:18-19):

Do not remember the former things,

**Do not consider the ways of old.**

God is about to do a new thing,

**It is about to spring forth!**

God is going to make a new way through the wilderness,

**God will bring rivers to the desert.**

God is doing something new in us

**Be ready! Be transformed! Be a new creation for Christ! Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we confess that we do not trust You fully. We put our hope in worldly gain and in human promises, and find ourselves defeated and lost when things fall apart. You have given us a love more fully than anything we could experience in this world but we do not seek it, we do not hold on to it, and we look to our own means of assurance and security. Forgive us. Call us back to You that we may put our trust in You and not be afraid. May we hear the words so clearly as the disciples did on the day of the Transfiguration; may we rise up, and not be afraid. In the name of Jesus, who loves us and offers us forgiveness, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

You are God’s Beloved; with you, God is well pleased. You are renewed and restored. You are forgiven and loved. You are a new creation in Christ, everything old has passed away; see, everything is becoming new. Go and share the good news of God’s love. Amen.

Prayer

God of Ancient Times to days yet unfolding, may we feel Your presence in this time, in this space. May we know Your creative power in us as we create and build together something new. Help us to dismantle the old structures and ways that oppress and hinder others. Help us to work with You to build into the vision of the new kingdom, the new reign, the community of faith and love. You are always doing something new. Help us to be part of it and to participate in the creative work. In the name of Jesus, may Your work unfold in us. Amen.