Worship Resources for March 20th, 2016—Palm/Passion Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16 or Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 19:28-40 or Luke 22:14-23:56 (or Luke 23:1-49)

Narrative Lectionary: Lord’s Supper, Prayer in Gethsemane, Mark 14:22-42 (Psalm 116:12-19)

The last Sunday in Lent has arrived. The prophet Isaiah speaks in 50:4-9a in the point of view of the Suffering Servant. Israel has suffered much, and in the aftermath of the exile, Isaiah shows that Israel’s obedience in going into exile has not been for nothing, but that God is the one who continues to help them, and sees them through.

The psalmist pleads in Psalm 31:9-16 for God’s deliverance. In the first part of the psalm, the singer calls upon God to hear and to be their refuge, exalting the name of God. But in this part of the psalm, the plea is lifted up. The psalmist cries out for God to save them from their enemies, and from shame and scorn.

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 sings praise to God for God’s steadfast love, declaring that the rejected stone has become the chief cornerstone—the people rejected by others have become God’s people. God is the one who gives light, and God is the one who gives blessings and is worthy of thanksgiving.

Philippians 2:5-11 contains the ancient confession and song of Paul (or perhaps of the early church, attributed to Paul), of Jesus’ humility and humanity, becoming so human as to die, and to die on a cross. God had exalted him, and Paul declares Jesus Christ as Lord—the one who became so human is now glorified above all.

Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem in Luke 19:28-40 causes the people to shout out. Unlike the other accounts that use the word “Hosanna” which means “Save Us,” Luke’s account has the “multitude of disciples” shouting a phrase that echoes back to the birth narrative in Luke: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory to the highest heaven!” The angels declared peace on earth, and goodwill to all. Now, the disciples echo that call back. And when some Pharisees tell Jesus to order the disciples to stop, Jesus declares if they were silent, the stones would shout out.

Luke 22:14-23:56 is Luke’s account of Jesus’ last night and day. Jesus’ discourse to the disciples over the Last Supper includes an argument among the disciples of who is greatest. Jesus reminds them that they are not like the Gentiles who lord it over one another, but that all of them must become like those who serve—and at the same time, all of them have their part in the reign of Christ. Jesus warns them that though they have already faced trials, but they will all be “sifted like wheat.” Jesus especially warns Simon Peter of his own denial that is coming, but in Luke’s account, Jesus also tells him that once he has “turned back” to “strengthen your brothers.” Luke is also the only account in which Herod is mentioned during Jesus’ trial, and Jesus is briefly given over to Herod. Herod, being a puppet king under the Roman government, was not friends with Pilate, who had direct authority over him, but after this, they become friends, as Jesus becomes the victim of their violence. Luke’s account is also the only one in which one of the two crucified with Jesus repents while on the cross.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Lord’s Supper and Jesus’ betrayal by Judas. Jesus does tell the disciples that “after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” (vs. 28). But the disciples cannot even comprehend what is coming with his arrest and death—Peter declares he will not deny Jesus, and the other say the same—though they cannot stay awake in the garden with him just a short time later.

Psalm 116:12-19 sings of being the servant of God. The faithful servant follows the Lord even to death, knowing that God will be faithful and save them. The faithful servant fulfills their vows, and calls upon the name of the Lord.

The angel spoke at Jesus’ birth, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” And the multitude of the heavenly host declared, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, and goodwill to all.” As the multitude of disciples echo back to the heavenly host “Peace in heaven, and glory to the highest heaven!” the line between earth and heaven is blurred. The cross not only crosses the line between earth and heaven, but erases it with Christ’s resurrection. On Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, which leads to the cross, and into eternal life.

Call to Worship

O Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good!

 **God’s steadfast love endures forever!**

This is the day that the Lord has made!

 **Let us rejoice and be glad in it!**

Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

 **Hosanna! We come to worship Jesus, God Who Saves! Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Forgive us, O God, for our violent ways. Forgive us for our faithlessness. Forgive us for our half-heartedness and short-sightedness. Forgive us for shouting “Hosanna, Save Us!” one moment, and “Crucify Him!” in the next. Forgive us, most of all, for turning to violence instead of love. We know that violence is transformed at the cross, and does not have the final word. We know that death is transformed at the cross, and does not have the final word. We know that sin is transformed at the cross, and does not have the final word. You have taken our guilt, our shame, our violence, sin, and death, and transformed us in Your love, and for that, we are eternally grateful, and belong to You as Your beloved children. May we live into Your ways of love, mercy, forgiveness and peace. In the name of the Prince of Peace we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The stones shout out, Love Wins! Our shouts of “Crucify Him” will be transformed to “He Is Risen.” Death and sin are transformed into eternal life and forgiveness. We are transformed, and will never be the same. Go, sharing the story of Jesus the Christ, and what Christ has done for you. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient of Days, You created life, and that life never ends because Your love never ends. Your love for us was magnified by the coming of Your Son, Jesus the Christ, into the world and into our lives. As we remember, year after year, our own shortcomings and faults, we also remember that You are greater than our mistakes. You are greater than anything that causes us to stumble. We remember, year after year, because we are waiting for Your coming into our world and our lives in a new way. We remember, year after year, that we need resurrection, that we need new life, and that You have overcome sin and death forever, and they do not have a hold on us. We give You all the thanksgiving and praise, knowing You are coming again in a new way. In Your name we pray. Amen.