Worship Resources for March 22nd 2015—Fifth Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

Narrative Lectionary: Last Judgment, Matthew 25:31-46 (Psalm 98:7-9)

As we journey through the covenants in the Hebrew Scriptures, we come to the covenant told by the prophet Jeremiah, in which God is making a new covenant with the people, one written on our hearts—therefore, it cannot be broken. The covenant is no longer a list of rules, but it is the love written on our hearts, so we know God’s love and we have become God’s people. People break rules, and forget contracts, but the covenant with God cannot be broken because the covenant is simply that God will be our God, and that God’s love endures forever. That is the law of God, and we cannot break that, therefore the covenant cannot be broken.

Psalm 51:1-12 is a personal plea from the psalmist for forgiveness. Historically attributed to David, the psalmist goes to God knowing that they have sinned and desires to be made clean, to be renewed and restored in relationship with God. The psalmist knows they have gone astray from God’s ways, and they have gone directly to God for forgiveness and restoration.

Psalm 119:9-16 sings of delighting in God’s ways and keeping God’s words close to one’s heart. The psalmist knows how easy it is to fall astray, and that by meditating on God’s words and teachings and reciting them by heart, the psalmist singings of the joy of knowing God and following God’s way.

Hebrews 5:5-10 gives reference to the priest Melchizedek, referenced once before in Psalm 110:4 and in Genesis 14:18, a priest that Abraham encounters. This strange figure was a priest of God Most High, the same God that called Abraham, and was the first priest of God named in the Bible. Jesus is seen by the writer of Hebrews as being in the line of Melchizedek, interceding on behalf of all of us with his very life.

John 12:20-33 tells of a time some Greeks came to see Jesus. It is rare for Greeks to appear interested in Jesus in the Gospels, but it does happen—in Luke, a centurion sends a message to Jesus, and here in John’s account the desire of these Greeks to meet Jesus is the sign that the time has come for Jesus to be glorified. Jesus has come for all people, not just for his own people of Israel. But first, the disciples must understand who he is—and it is clear in this passage, and in the coming chapters—that they don’t quite understand yet. Jesus declares that all people will be drawn to him, and that those who serve him must follow him, and be willing to lose their life. This is an uneasy time, but this is the moment Jesus knows has come so that all will know God’s love through him.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the end of Chapter 25 of Matthew, the final parable Jesus tells in Matthew’s account, in which the king will welcome those in who have welcomed the stranger, visited the imprisoned, prayed for the sick, clothed the naked and fed the hungry; and that those who did not do those things did not welcome him. The message is clear: our actions are as important, if not more important, than our words. Our lives are witnesses to God’s love and mercy in our lives, and how we extend that love and mercy to others.

Psalm 98:7-9 sings of all creation celebrating the coming of God at the time of judgment. All the world’s people will be judged, but God judges with righteousness and equity. God’s judgment is just and fair.

God loves us, and God made us, and God knows that we fall short and sin. God’s love, however, endures forever and God’s covenant is written in our hearts. But we are called to live out that covenant by loving one another, and turning back to God when we have gone astray. We are called to seek forgiveness for what we have done wrong, and forgive others when they wrong us in the same way. Jesus calls us to a new way of life, a way that leads to eternal life.

Call to Worship

God is making a new covenant with us,

 **A covenant written on our hearts instead of stone.**

God is doing something new in us,

 **Our very lives are a temple of God’s spirit.**

God is doing something new in our world,

 **We have the promise of eternal life.**

God is making all things new;

 **Let us worship our God, who is with us now. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that we have not lived as if Your love is written in our hearts. We have lived as if our hearts are empty and can only be filled by consumption. We consume time, energy, wealth, and worldly visions of success, but still it is not enough. Help us to remember that You have filled our hearts with Your love, and with compassion for our neighbor. Guide us back to being in tune with Your covenant written within us, so that we can live out Your commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, as You first loved us. In the name of Christ, who gave his life for us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Great is God’s faithfulness, so much so that God is guiding us back even when we are still falling away. God’s love is always with us, and when we cannot feel it, it is in the love of those that surround us. May we journey in faith together, knowing that God is forgiving us, and giving us each other for strength on the journey. We are not alone. God’s love endures forever. You are loved and forgiven. Amen.

Prayer

Loving God, You created us in Your image, and You have put a new heart within us, one with Your covenant written upon it. You have called us to follow You and Your ways, to be Your people, to be one in You. May we know that we are not alone. May we remember to turn to others, to ask others to pray for us, to ask for help and guidance, for You have called us to love our neighbor, and that is not only for us to love others, but also to be loved by others. In our time of need, when our faith waivers, when we feel unloved, may we be reminded of Your love and grace in the love and compassion of our neighbors, that we are one body in Christ. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.