Worship Resources for March 23rd, 2014—Third Sunday of Lent

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

Our passage from the Hebrew Scriptures today contains the story of God providing water for the people in the wilderness, but only after they complained to Moses and Moses complained to God. God tells Moses to use the same staff that he used to strike the Nile river and turn it into blood to now strike the rock at Horeb and that water will be poured out of it. God has taken what was once used to cause destruction and death in the river (and even at the Red Sea, though the Israelites passed safely over, death and destruction came to Pharaoh’s army) to now create something new—fresh water, new hope for the people who have just escaped slavery into freedom but do not understand the value of that freedom and long to escape the wilderness.

Psalm 95 sings of God as the one who brings salvation, God who created the whole earth is the maker of human beings, and is their true shepherd. But the people have gone astray, and the psalmist reminds them of their time in the wilderness, how for forty years, even though God was with them, their hearts lost their way.

Paul speaks of God’s reconciliation with us in Romans 5:1-11, and the importance of persevering and enduring, though we may suffer. Paul does not justify suffering as necessary for faith; rather Paul inspires hope for those who are suffering, because hope will not disappoint us, hope will not fail us. In our suffering, we can boast that God is with us—which is ironic because we often feel that God is absent when we are suffering, but Paul declares the opposite. Again, this is not to justify suffering as necessary, but for those who feel hopeless, Paul declares hope. For those who are suffering, Paul declares relief is coming. For those who have been waiting and whose patience is running thin, Paul declares victory in Christ.

John 4:5-42 is one of three very long passages in the Gospel of John for Lent. This is the story of the Samaritan woman who comes to Jacob’s well to draw water and instead finds the Living Water in Jesus. A Jew would not have been seen with a Samaritan, let alone a Jewish man with a Samaritan woman, but Jesus breaks down all the walls of gender, ethnicity, culture and even religion to share about the Living Water, in which we will never thirst for God again. What once would have been an opportunity for ridicule, even abuse, is turned into an opportunity for hope and new life—and indeed the Samaritan woman goes and tells everyone in the village about Jesus. This woman, who has been married five times before and is living with someone who is not her husband, faces no judgment from Jesus, but rather is offered the gift of eternal life.

The staff of Moses—a symbol of God’s judgment and wrath at the Nile and at the Red Sea—is turned into a symbol of God’s abundance and provision in providing water from the rock of Horeb. Jacob’s well—a symbolic meeting place, where marriage stories often begin (look back to Rebekah and Isaac) but had also become a place where men and women were separated and in this case, where Jews and Samaritans were not supposed to meet—becomes a place where a woman finds new hope and new life. And so we see these symbols of the staff and the well alongside the cross—a symbol of ultimate death and destruction by the Empire, become a symbol of death and sin defeated and Christ triumphant. God is turning what was once death into life, what was once destructive into hope. God is making all things new.

Call to Worship

God is our Rock and our Salvation

 **God is our Maker and Redeemer**

God is our Provider and Helper

 **God is our Shepherd and Savior**

Let us worship God in prayer and praise

 **Let us worship God as the body of Christ. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we declare before You that we have sinned, we have fallen short. We have failed to acknowledge Your present abundance and instead complained and cursed what we do not have. We have looked with envy upon our neighbors and bitterly desired to have what they have, whether it be possessions, wealth, success, or even love. Forgive us. Call us to repent, to seek You, and remember that You are the Living Water that rushes up to an everlasting stream, where we will never thirst again. You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Let us turn back, knowing Your love and forgiveness. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

We are no different. We all have made mistakes, we all have fallen into the ways of the world, we all have hit our face on the ground. God lifts us up. God brushes the dust off of our knees, holds our face, and tells us that we will be all right. We are forgiven. We are loved. We are set back on the right path. Go and live into the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Creator God, may we see You at work in the rising sun every day. May we see You at work in the rolling fog or the cloudy skies. May we see You at work in the rain that falls upon the earth. May we see You at work in the setting sun and the rising moon, the stars that shine, whether we can see them or not. May we know always that You are doing something new, every moment, every day, every year around the sun. Great is Your Faithfulness, O God, as You faithfully renew us every day. Amen.