Worship Resources for March 3—Third Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; Luke 13:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

On this third Sunday of Lent, we continue our thread in the ancient writings of the Hebrews of God’s covenant, reading Isaiah 55 and knowing that God still loves the people despite where they have gone wrong, just as God loved David despite the fact he was flawed, sinned and fell short. God still invites us to participate in the covenant, even though we have not kept our end. God still provides for us, even though we have abused what we have been given. Repent, turn back and seek God, and we will find that God is still offering to establish a covenant with us, God is still providing an abundant feast, where we will never thirst or hunger.

Psalm 63:1-8 contains the words of the psalmist who seeks God as one seeks water in a desert. We seek because we want to be satisfied. Not to just get by, but because we want to never again be thirsty. So it is that we seek God, not to just get by in our daily woes, but because we know without God we do not have life and we will always be seeking something more. We know that when we turn to God, God is there, God is waiting for us, and God provides.

Luke 13:1-9 contains the parable of the Fig Tree as told in Luke, but also tells of a massacre by Pilate against some Galileans. The question is really about punishment—did the Galileans deserve their punishment? Did God cause their punishment? It is a question we continue to ask today: do bad things happen because people deserved them? Can we really know who is in hell or heaven? Jesus tells them, “No, but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” The focus is on *you*, not them. The focus is not about worrying about other’s punishment or need for repentance, but our own. We are the ones in need of turning back to God. We know that we are judged by God. I know my own sins and shortcomings. If I judge others, I am using the opportunity to evade culpability for my own wrongdoings. Jesus uses the story of the fig tree to remind us that we all have been given the opportunity to turn back to God, and that through Jesus we are reminded of that possibility, but only we can produce good fruit. We can’t go pointing out the wrongdoings of others when we are still at fault ourselves. We are the ones who need to repent and turn back to God.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 reminds us that to be faithful to God is to remain in God’s ways, we actually do need to repent in our own lives and to be faithful to God’s ways. Paul looks the Israelites in the desert with Moses as examples of those who had seen God’s deliverance and yet reverted to their old ways. The church in Corinth was full of division and many were continuing cultural practices, including ignoring the poor at the Lord’s table (ch.9), having a sexual relationship with one’s stepmother (ch. 7), and so on. The Corinthians claimed to follow Jesus, but also claimed a lot of other things, such as cultural practices that were harmful to others. Paul calls upon the church in Corinth to remember their ancestors and their mistakes, and that we must all be accountable for our actions and know that God is the one who judges us.

In this season of Lent, when we talk about repentance/turning back to God, it can be easy to start seeing the specks in other’s eyes. We can also interpret earthly disasters as God’s judgment, or consequences of poor decisions as God’s punishment. But we shouldn’t be looking for the sins of others, looking at their mistakes, when we still have plenty of our own. It is our own self we must deal with, our own self that we must bring into accountability. For we can only change ourselves. Any therapist will tell you that we cannot change others, but we can change ourselves and how we react to others.

This is also the message from Jesus: we can’t change whether others sin or not, we can’t know for sure that what happens to them is punishment or not, but we do know for ourselves that we need to change, we need to repent and we need to seek forgiveness for where we have gone wrong.

Call to Worship

Sometimes our life’s journey turns difficult and challenging

 **God guides our steps and brings us back to the way**

Sometimes the path grows dark and menacing

 **Christ shines his light so that we can see the way**

Sometimes we feel lonely, forgotten, and downtrodden

 **The Spirit moves in us, comforting us and giving us hope**

God is with us, every step of the way

 **May we know God’s presence along this journey of faith. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Providing God, You have given us an abundance in creation, but we have misused it. We have hoarded resources from others, abused the resources given to us, and we have damaged and destroyed Your creation for our own desires. We are quick to point out the faults in others, but we have failed to take care of what You have given us. Forgive us for living in ways that are harmful to others and creation. Forgive us for not accepting our own responsibility and doing what we can to change how we live. Call us back to Your ways of honoring Your creation, caring for all created beings and using Your resources for the well-being of all. In the name of Christ, who taught us how to live with one another in love, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

We know that God calls us into the ways of wholeness and healing. We know that God always shows us another way to live. We know that God forgives us when we forgive others. We know that we have been given new life in Christ. Go with the knowledge of God’s love and forgiveness in your hearts, and share it with the world. Amen.

Prayer

Molder and Shaper of the earth, You have built us up, made us to be people to love one another, and by loving others we love You. When we have stretched ourselves thin, mold us back to be connected with You. When we have been pushed down, renew our strength and courage to reach up and extend out into the world. When we feel torn and broken, mend us back together. You are the Potter, the Mender, the One who renews us. In the name of Christ, who makes us all new, we pray. Amen.