Worship Resources for March 3rd, 2019—Transfiguration Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12:4-2; Luke 9:28-36 (37-43a)

Narrative Lectionary: Transfiguration, Matthew 16:24-17:8 (Psalm 41:7-10)

On Transfiguration Sunday, in the Hebrew Scriptures we recall how Moses’ face shown when he spoke with God in Exodus 34:29-35. Aaron and the others were afraid of him when he came down the mountain with his face shining. Moses shared with the people the covenant God had spoken through him, and then he covered his face with a veil, so the people would not be frightened. But when he spoke with God, he took the veil off.

Psalm 99 is a song of praise to God who is the ultimate king. The psalmist calls upon all people to praise God, who is holy. Recalling Moses and Aaron, who served God as priests, and Samuel, God’s prophet, the author sings of how God spoke through them. They were the ones who were given God’s statutes and decrees, and God answered their cries and prayers—but God also avenges the wrongdoing against them. The psalmist concludes by calling the people to worship at God’s holy mountain, where in ancient times, the peoples believed God lived.

In 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2, Paul uses the image of Moses covered with a veil as a way of showing how God was not yet fully revealed. This is Paul (or a student of Paul’s) image of how those who still followed the Jewish laws were not seeing God fully revealed in Christ. However, that is not how the Exodus story has been understood in the Jewish community, and this is clearly an out-of-context metaphorical use. Through Christ, the letter teaches us, God’s glory has been fully revealed, and we see that glory in one another. The faithful do not hide with cunning and false truths, but by being open and vulnerable in front of God, they are revealed in the image of God.

In Luke’s account of Jesus’ Transfiguration, Jesus has taken Peter, James, and John up the mountain with him to pray. They are “weighed down with sleep” but they experience Jesus’ clothes turning dazzling white, and the appearance of his face changed. Moses and Elijah also appear with him. However, in Luke’s account, the figures are leaving when Peter declares it is good to be there, and suggests making dwellings for all three of them (suggesting Peter wants the other two to remain). A cloud overshadows them, and Peter, James, and John are terrified. After the voice booms down from heaven that this is “my Son, my Chosen; listen to him,” they find Jesus alone, and they don’t say anything to anyone. In the continuing verses, it is the next day that they are met by a great crowd, and a desperate father looking for help for his son possessed by a spirit. Jesus appears to be angry at the “faithless and perverse generation” after his own disciples were unable to cast the spirit out. Jesus rebukes the spirit, heals the boy and gives him back to his father. While we don’t know why the disciples were unable to cast out the spirit, it seems that they had given up and left the father to fend on his own for help.

The Narrative Lectionary also follows Jesus’ transfiguration, but from Matthew’s account. In Matthew 16:24-17:8, we begin with five verses before the Transfiguration account that happens six days later. In these five verses, Jesus tells the disciples that if they want to follow him, they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. Those who want to save their life will lose it. Then, at the Transfiguration six days later, Peter, James, and John accompany Jesus on a high mountain where they experience his transfiguration: Jesus’ clothes become dazzling white, and his face shines like the sun. Peter, as in Luke’s account, declares it is good to be there and that he will make three dwellings for them. While he was speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, telling them to listen to the Son. They were overcome by fear, but Jesus tells them to get up and not be afraid.

In Psalm 41:7-10, the psalmist has experienced betrayal. They write of those who hate them, that they imagine the worst for the psalmist, that something deadly is holding the psalmist down and that they will not rise again. Even their closest friend has betrayed them and is against them. However, God is gracious, and will raise them up.

The Transfiguration is a strange story we read each year the Sunday before Lent begins. It marks the end of the season after the Epiphany, the season of revealing Christ to the world. Jesus is revealed in full glory to his disciples on the mountain, but what exactly does that mean? Peter seems to still think of Jesus in worldly terms, as a divine king now establishing his eternal throne on earth, but this isn’t what Jesus set out to do. Instead, Jesus came to heal those who were sick, to restore those who’d been left out. The kingdom is not of this world in the way that earthly kingdoms are, but to be part of the kingdom of God means to become last of all and servant of all. To serve those in need.

Call to Worship

Bless one another, love one another, serve one another;

 **For by doing so, we bless, love, and serve Christ.**

Forgive one another, seek peace, do justice;

 **For by doing so, we follow the way of Christ.**

Live into hope, keep to faith, stay close to the truth;

 **For by doing so, we know Jesus as Lord.**

Come, enter this time of worship, coming before Christ our Lord;

 **Who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We confess our weary spirits, O God. We confess our tiredness. We confess that at times we are burned out and broken down. We confess that the work of justice, peace, and mercy has been difficult, and has yielded more sorrow at times than joy. We come before You, knowing You have taken this burden upon Yourself, so that we might know the fullness of Your reign. Grant us inner peace. Grant us a renewed spirit for justice. Grant us mercy beyond what we can imagine, and rest, so we may take upon the mantle You have bestowed upon us: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God restores. God heals. God brings rest for the weary. God binds up the broken-hearted. God renews our spirits. God is with you, now. Healing is with you, now. Even if you do not feel it at this time, know that God is right with you, God is working in you and through you, and God loves you. Amen.

Prayer

Holy Healer, we call upon You in our brokenness, in our distress. We call upon You in our times of simply feeling run down and tired. We call upon You to restore us. Help us to say no when needed. Help us to set boundaries that are healthy for ourselves as well as for others. Help us to seek You, and in our well-being, may we do the work You have called us to do, to bring healing to the world. Amen.