Worship Resources for March 30th, 2014—Fourth Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

The story of David being anointed king is a story of God, once again, choosing someone who would be passed over. He is the youngest, he is out with the sheep, but he will become the shepherd of Israel. He is not strong and tall like his brothers, but God sees something in him that even Samuel the prophet cannot see. And David is not perfect, as we know his story: God chooses the imperfect, the small, the young—the ones overlooked by everyone else. David, however, is described as handsome, perhaps to show us as readers and hearers of the story that David may not seem like much now, but will become something great.

Psalm 23 is so familiar for many of us, we grew up reciting it in the King James Version. Psalm 23 is about knowing the unknowable, that though the valley is dark and in the shadow of death we will see it through because God is walking beside us. God is our shepherd. God will see us through to the place where the table is full and our cup runs over with the abundance of God’s love, mercy, and grace. Though parts of the world may be dark and menacing, God intends cool waters, green pastures, and the peace of knowing God is present with us, always.

Ephesians 5:8-14 reminds us that God intends for us to live in the light—“for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true” (vs. 8). We are reminded that we witness in all that we do, and the call of Christ is to live in the way of the light. For when we follow Christ and live into his ways, everything is exposed. There is nothing that is shameful or hidden, but all of our lives are used for the glory of God when we live as children of light. We are warned not to be foolish, not to fall into debauchery, into activity that is often associated with shame and regret, but rather to be wise, filled with the Spirit, and live without shame, guilt, or fear as children of light.

John 9:1-41 is the third of four long passages from John during Lent. In this passage, the disciples ask Jesus about a man who was born blind, whether he sinned or if his parents did. There was an old belief that God punished people for the sins of their parents or grandparents, found even in the Hebrew scriptures (Exodus and Isaiah), but this was starting to be questioned by prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, over five hundred years before Jesus. So Jesus is not giving a new answer to an old question, but rather suggesting that the question is pointless to begin with. However, this passage is still very troubling. It suggests that people with disabilities are to be used as examples of how God works through healing miracles. In our world today, we often single out persons with disabilities as examples of triumph over disability to be examples or inspiration for others. As a mother of a child with a disability, I reject that notion. I also admit that the healing passages of Jesus can be troubling, but they reflect a worldview of the first century that disability meant someone was not whole and not able to participate in society—that they were somehow less than others and that Jesus made them whole. But the other part of this passage is that the man was a beggar (vs. 8)—if you were disabled in the first century, you could not work and had to beg in order to survive. This man no longer has to beg. In today’s world, we have learned that persons with disabilities can fully participate in society and work and play with everyone else. Nancy Eisland, who wrote *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* would say that we are all “temporarily abled.” While this long passage is included in the lectionary during Lent as a way of revealing who Jesus is, that Jesus is the one who opens the eyes of the people metaphorically to see God in a new way—we must be aware of how this passage has been read in the past and how it can be used to limit our view of persons with disabilities.

We are called to be children of light. There should be no darkness, no shame, no guilt—everything we do ought to reveal who God is to the world. Do we live up to this? Probably not, but it is what we strive for. And part of the work of being children of light is being careful of who we might leave in the dark, or that we ourselves may not be embracing the children of God as fully as we ought to. There is so much that we do not perceive ourselves, but God views what we cannot; God knows what we do not. We are all cherished and loved by God. We are all walking towards the light, even if there is darkness around us. Sometimes, in the darkest times of doubt in my life, the prayer that I have uttered is: “I know, that I know, that I know.” In other words, I know, deep down, there is more to life than what I have experienced and perceived, and I know, that I know, that I know—God is with me, and I am not alone.

Call to Worship

God is our Shield and our Defender

 **God is our Comforter, Our Redeemer and Friend**

God is the Ancient of Days

 **God is the Spirit among us**

God is in the beginning and end

 **God is our Alpha and Omega**

Come, let us worship our God

 **Let us worship the Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wholeness, we confess that we are fractured and scattered. We think we see in the mirror fully, but we still see through the glass darkly. We perceive others as less than ourselves. We look down on those whom we think do not work hard enough, and we compare others to ourselves. We do not see our neighbors as our brothers and sisters. Forgive us. Forgive us for not viewing others the way You view all of us, as Your children. Call us again to the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves, and call us to seek their well-being and to see their full value. In the name of Christ, who forgives and restores us all, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from 1 Corinthians 13:12-13)

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, then we will see face to face. Now we know only in part, then we will know fully, even as we have been fully known by God. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. Go from this place, knowing the love of God, and sharing that love with others. Amen.

Prayer

Everlasting God, we know so little. Our lives are but a blink in the light of the universal calendar. Our experience is only of this world, this small tiny part of Your created universe. Our lives are only one of seven billion human lives on this planet now. We think we know it all, but we know so little. Help us to know one thing: that You created us in love, and that You love us, and that we are called to love others and to care for all that You have given us, especially this world. Let us trust in this knowledge: You have given us this life in the hope we might make our world a little better, and make Your light known a little brighter. Help us to do this work You have called us to do. In the name of Christ, who was in the beginning with You, who walked this earth among us, and will come into this world in a new way, we pray. Amen.