Worship Resources for March 4th, 2018—Third Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

Narrative Lectionary: Peter’s Denial, John 18:12-27 (Psalm 17:1-7)

See my Lenten Series “Spring Cleaning Your Spiritual Life,” focusing on the Hebrew Scripture readings.

The covenant between God and the people is given via Moses on Mount Sinai, the commandments so that the people would remember who their God was, and who they were as God’s people. These commandments were given to a freed people, founding a new community, a new nation, and in the wilderness where it was easy to be caught up in the peoples around them, the covenant with God formed their identity. This is who they were: people who honored and loved God and treated each other well. Their identity was not in a list of rules, but a covenant, and their very lives were witness that they kept the covenant.

The psalmist praises God for the law of God in Psalm 19. This law is written into the firmament, into the very heavens above, the voice of day and night, the sun coming out each day like a bridegroom ready to meet the bride. The law is what keeps the people close to God, and the psalmist asks for God to cleanse them, make them whole before God, and for their words and meditations to be accepted by God.

Part of Paul’s introduction to the church at Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, is to declare boldly the faith in Christ crucified, which doesn’t make sense. Living by laying down one’s life doesn’t make sense, but it is exactly what God does through Jesus. A crucified Messiah is not what the Jewish believers were expecting, and following the teachings of a young prophet killed by the state doesn’t make sense to the Greek philosophers. But Paul declares Christ crucified, God who gave up their life for us so that we might have life.

John’s account of Jesus driving out the moneychangers is different from the Synoptic gospel accounts. In John 2:13-22, Jesus enters Jerusalem near the beginning of his ministry (John is the only account that has Jesus’ ministry lasting three years). Jesus also, instead of turning over the tables of the moneychangers, makes a whip of cords to drive them out. The exploitation of the poor inside the temple was more than Jesus could bear. Similar to the other accounts, Jesus declares himself to be the temple, his own body, eluding to his coming death and resurrection, and his anger at the exploitation of the poor in God’s name.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Peter’s Denial, in John 18:12-27. Peter is always quick to have the answers, to try to be the example of the faithful disciple, but when tested, Peter is afraid. He tries to stay close to Jesus, but denies that he knew him, to try to save himself. In many ways, Peter is one of the most understandable disciples, because who of us has failed to stay faithful? Who of us, when tested, have shied away from speaking the truth? Peter did not expect Jesus to be betrayed and arrested. Peter did not expect all of this to happen, even though Jesus told him it would, even told Peter that he would deny him.

The psalmist cries out to God in Psalm 17:1-7, for God to hear their prayer, for God to fulfill what God has promised and to answer the psalmist in their time of need. The psalmist has remained faithful, and despite what they are facing, has not sinned, has not turned to violence, and has kept to God’s ways.

How is your life a witness to God’s work in the world? The covenant on Sinai shows us how we ought to order our life, to put God first along with our neighbors. That we love God and love others sums up the commandments according to Jesus. But do our lives show this? If someone was to meet us for the first time, what would they know about us? What would they observe? Would they see worldly measures of importance and success, or would they see the love of God in all that we do and say?

A suggestion for an alternative Call to Worship or litany for this day would be to use the Prayer of St. Francis.

Call to Worship

We honor this time and keep it holy,

**Because God makes all moments holy.**

We gather in this space to worship,

**Because we worship God everywhere we go.**

We lift up our prayers and our praise to God now,

**So that our daily life will be a witness of God’s love, grace, and mercy.**

Come, worship God, and find the sacred now,

**Come, worship God, and find the holy in everyday life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty One, we confess that we have not ordered our lives well. We have placed our own desires as priorities over what You taught us was most important. We have not loved our neighbors and have not witnessed Your love in our daily lives. We have measured our success based on the stock market and not in lives transformed. We have gathered up worldly treasures for ourselves instead of meeting the needs of those around us. Forgive us for our mistakes. Forgive us for our selfishness. Forgive us for our short-sightedness. Call us into Your ways of love. Call us into Your ways of reparation and reconciliation. Call us to order our lives as Your Son Jesus taught us, to love You, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In the Savior’s name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God made the Earth and the planets to revolve around the sun, and so we, too, must revolve around God and not ourselves. Put your lives back in order by putting God at the center, and strive to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God, knowing that our revolutions around the sun are numbered. In our short time, may we take the long view, and witness to God’s love and forgiveness in our lifetime and legacy. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient of Days, You have seen it all. You have seen us rise and fall, You have seen us do amazing, wonderful things, and You have seen us destroy the earth You created. You have made us capable of such amazing, wondrous love and creativity, but we have failed to use our greatest potential for the greatest good. Put us back on track. Guide our lives to be witnesses of Your love, beauty, and the co-creative spirit that You made in us, in Your image. Ancient of Days, in awe we came to know You. In awe, may we live out Your ways of love, justice, and peace, knowing our time is short, but Your love is eternal. Amen.