Worship Resources for March 5, 2017—First Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Narrative Lectionary: Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-42 (Psalm 15 or 15:1)

We begin the season of Lent in the Hebrew Scriptures with the tale of the temptation of the first human beings. God told the human being (adam) not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In chapter three, the serpent tempts the human beings to eat from it. When they do, their eyes are open to the ways of the world. They understand shame and guilt. They want to hide who they are. Sin exposes our vulnerabilities, and as human beings we want to cover them up, hide them, keep our flaws and our faults unknown. But God has already known our vulnerabilities, and did not see them as something to be ashamed of.

The psalmist sings of God’s deliverance in Psalm 32. Sin is the unseen harm, the unspoken hurt that causes pain and grief, but when the psalmist confesses their sin to God, they are forgiven of their guilt. They are no longer ashamed. The psalmist calls upon all to seek God, to not hide away their shame and guilt but to confess before God, for God is our hiding place, our shelter, and the one who instructs us and in whom we find joy.

In Romans 5:12-19, Paul explains how sin has come into the world and that death has dominion over us, but through the “free gift,” death no longer has a hold on us. Sin leads to judgment, and judgment to condemnation. The “free gift” (Christ’s righteousness) follows sin, but leads to justification. Instead of judgment, there is righteousness—turning to right-living—and life for all.

Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness in Matthew 4:1-11. After he is led into the wilderness by the Spirit, he is there for a long time, and he is famished. The temptation is to turn to his own needs first, but Jesus recalls that he is there to draw closer to God, and that his fasting is to help him to rely on God. The second temptation that Christ faces is the temptation to prove himself to God, that he really is the son of God, and that God will save him. But Jesus knows he ought not to put God to the test. As human begins we do this often when we begin prayers with, “God, if you do this, I promise I will do that.” The final temptation is for power and control. To give in to the devil is to give in to the temptation to have power and control over everything. Even Jesus has to give up power and control, to worship and serve only God.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In Luke’s account, this parable follows a question by a lawyer trying to test him. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is; here, he is asked what one must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds with asking the lawyer what is written in scripture, and the lawyer replies with loving God with our whole being, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. In Luke’s account, the lawyer asks another question, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells a story of how a priest and a Levite ignore a man who was beaten to near death, but a Samaritan, one who did not follow the same customs and culture and interpretation of the law, lives out the law far better than the two religious men. The lawyer is forced to conclude that the one was a neighbor to the one in need was the one who showed mercy.

The pericope in the Narrative Lectionary also includes the story of Mary and Martha, and how Martha is trying to do everything right and is annoyed her sister isn’t helping, but Mary is the one who listens to what Jesus is saying.

The psalmist asks who may dwell with God in Psalm 15:1, and answers their own question with those who live in the right way, into God’s way—for they shall never be moved. They will be steadfast with God if they live into God’s way. We pay lip service to God’s way, but to steer clear of slander and speak the truth with love, to do what is right and not take advantage of others is a difficult way to live in our world, but it is what God requires of us.

The temptation the world flings at us is to believe that we are unworthy and unloved. We believe that our flaws and shortcomings are something to hide away and be ashamed of, rather than embracing our gifts and strengths though our vulnerability. The temptation that we must play the game of the world and out maneuver others for power and control fades away when we follow the One who gave up everything for the sake of the world. To break the power of temptation, we must accept that the world’s ways and love are temporary, but God loves us so much, that God sent the Only One to us, so we might know God’s love is eternal.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 32:1,2,11 & 8)

Happy are those who come before God,

 **Happy are all who find forgiveness of sins.**

Happy are those who are blameless before God,

 **Happy are those who are honest about their shortcomings.**

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,

 **And shout for joy, all you upright in heart.**

God is the one who instructs us, and teaches us the way to go;

 **Through Christ we know our sins are forgiven,**

**and we know the way to life, now and forever. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we come before You knowing that we do not tell the truth about ourselves. We cover up our flaws and shortcomings and put on a false face to the world, to try to be perfect and better than others. Peel off the mask, O God. Expose our flaws as our growing places. Open us to know that in Your love we are made perfect, and that You made us in Your image. Call us away from the temptations of the world to one-up others and to be better, and instead, to serve all as Your Son came to serve us. In the name of the One who came to show us The Way, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God is walking through the garden again, but this time, we will not hide. God is walking through the garden again, and this time, we will come before God, and leave behind the shame and guilt. We will come before God with all of who we are, our strength and our scars and know that the love of God has always been with us. Shed the lies and masks of the world, and come to the God who is calling Your name, and is planting something new in our world and in us. Amen.

Prayer

Holy One, You have shown us Your own vulnerability in the wilderness, by facing the temptations that we face. You have shown us Your own vulnerability by becoming like us, the least among us, serving us, and then dying on the cross like one of us. You have shown us Your own vulnerability in loving and trusting others who denied and betrayed and doubted You. You have shown us Your own vulnerability in the times You wept, in the times You prayed, in the times You were hungry and thirsty and in need. May we become like You, so that we might follow in Your ways, and know Your love by loving and serving all. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.