Worship Resources for March 6, 2016—Fourth Sunday in Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Narrative Lectionary: Great Commandment, Mark 12:28-44 (Psalm 89:1-4)

The passage in Joshua marks the crossing of a boundary, the end of one era and the beginning of another. As the people of Israel celebrate the Passover, the manna provided for them in the wilderness ceases, because God is providing for them in their new home, as they will eat the crops of Canaan. The way God has provided for the people changes, as their relationship will now grow into something new: a connection with the land, with the very earth God has made for them.

Psalm 32 is a psalm of confession. The psalmist sings about the release that comes when one confesses where they have gone wrong, when the shame and guilt is lifted. God forgives those who repent and confess their wrongdoing. God is the one in whom we trust and know that we have deliverance, from our enemies, and from the enemy of sin within us.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 calls us to look at humanity not through our own eyes, but through the eyes of God. Through death, everything becomes new. Christ has reconciled himself to us and has defeated sin and death at the cross, so sin and death no longer have a hold on us.

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 speaks of a time when some were complaining about the company Jesus was keeping, and he tells them a parable of a prodigal son and a forgiving father. Even before the son is able to speak, to confess his sins and ask for forgiveness, the father has already forgiven him, running towards him the moment he turned back home. The son that did not leave doesn’t understand, and is upset and jealous, but the father reminds him that he never left, so he never left the abundance of his father’s love, and the child that did leave needs that love more than ever.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Jesus teaching in the temple during the last week of his life. Jesus is asked by a scribe which is the greatest commandment, and when Jesus answers “Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself,” the scribe responds that Jesus is right, that this is more important than all of the sacrifices and rituals. Jesus tells this scribe he is not far from the kingdom of God. However, Jesus continues to teach and suggests that many of the scribes don’t understand—the scribes do not understand who the Messiah is, as they call him the Son of David, and the scribes also like to show how religious they are for the sake of appearance and honor, but do not follow God’s ways. Lastly, Jesus observes a widow putting two small copper coins in the treasury box after others have given out of their abundance. Jesus both upholds her as an example of giving all she has, but also ([and I credit David Lose for these thoughts on this passage](http://www.davidlose.net/2015/11/pentecost-24-b-surprisingly-good-news/)) condemns the fact that she is a poor widow, and has nothing left for herself because no one has given to her.

Psalm 89:1-4 sings praise to God who has made a covenant with David, to establish the throne forever. The psalmist sings of God’s steadfast love, a love that is established and faithful forever. This love will never end, being made known to David’s descendants, who will also never end.

Repentance. Turning back to God. Following God’s ways. These are common themes that we wrestle with in Lent, but we also need to accept that we have faults and shortcomings. Accepting we are not perfect is also a process. Accepting that we can’t do it all, can’t have it all, can’t be it all, because we are human beings and we are going to mess up, but we are going to try to do better. Wrestling with giving others the same grace that we have been given is also a challenge, to give others a chance to try again. Repentance goes both ways—repenting of our own sins and turning back to God, and accepting that others need the same patience and grace that we do in order to truly follow Jesus.

Call to Worship

We know that in God our sin is forgiven;

**We know that in Christ we have new life.**

We know that when we confess where we have gone wrong,

**God is already waiting with open arms to welcome us back.**

We enter this time of worship, knowing that we have made mistakes;

**We enter this time of worship knowing we have new life in Christ,**

**Who continues to set our feet onto the path of righteousness. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We come before You, O Christ, confessing that we have not forgiven others for the same mistakes we continue to make. We have not shown mercy when we have been shown mercy. We have judged others while asking to not be judged for our own ignorance and misunderstandings. Forgive us for not sharing grace and mercy. Forgive us for demanding so much of others while seeking forgiveness for ourselves. Help us to see our kindred in Christ, all of Your children, the way You see us, made in Your image, forgiven and restored. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God welcomes us with open arms before we even turn back. God forgives us before we even know we have done wrong. May we forgive others with the same grace. May we love others with the same love. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of Beauty, help us to find the beauty in life, in Your creation, in our very selves. Help us to lift up what is good and wonderful, kind and thoughtful and beautiful, in our lives and in the lives of others. Call us away from the negativity in the world that causes us to judge and look down on others, and instead to embrace Your goodness that is in all that You have created. In the name of Jesus the Christ, who turned death into eternal life, and turns our sin into forgiveness and restoration, we pray. Amen.