Worship Resources for March 8th, 2015—Third Sunday of Lent

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

Narrative Lectionary: Wedding Banquet, Matthew 22:1-14 (Psalm 45:6-7)

Our Hebrew Scriptures are focusing on the covenants with God. We began with the covenant with Noah and all of creation; then remembered the covenant with Abraham and Sarah; now we recall the covenant with Moses and the people on Sinai. This covenant includes the Ten Commandments, a new way to live for this people who have been delivered by God into freedom. For a people with no king, who began as a large family before growing into a great nation, they needed to find a way to get along, to live as a nation, and to maintain their independence. They needed to differentiate from the other people around them, and the covenant with God showed them the new way to live with God as their ruler and with one another as a nation.

Psalm 19 sings of the heavens proclaiming God’s good works, and the psalmist also sings of the law of God that is perfect. For those that follow the ways of God, there is delight and reward. The psalmist asks God to forgive them for unknown wrongdoing and to prepare their minds and hearts for God.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, Paul reminds the church in Corinth that they proclaim Christ crucified. Corinth, a church with deep divisions over culture and practice, was more concerned about their status and what local leaders they followed than over living out the message of Christ. They were divided over cultural religious beliefs as Jews and Gentiles, and Christ erases those lines through his death on the cross. Jesus was not the worldly messiah who would establish an earthly kingdom, nor did he teach as the philosophers did. He died in living for others, and if the Corinthians could die to themselves and live for others, they might end their quarreling divisions.

John 2:13-22 is John’s account of Jesus’ time in the temple and overturning the moneychanger’s tables. In the Synoptic gospels, this happens after Jesus has entered Jerusalem for the last time and is preparing for Passover, but in John’s account it happens early in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus also goes further in this account and makes a whip of cords to drive out the moneychangers. Jesus knew these actions would lead to those in power looking to kill him. Jesus also knew that the ones who were suffering in society would suffer most from the corrupt moneychangers. In this account, Jesus uses the temple as a metaphor for his own body, and foreshadows what is to come.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22:1-14. Jesus tells this parable in the days before he is killed, referring to the invitation of God—the ones who do not seem to deserve it will be invited in, but those who assume they deserve it will be exposed for who they really are. God calls all of us, but few respond to the invitation.

Psalm 45:6-7 refers to God as a king, regal and on a throne that reigns forever, holding out a scepter that signifies an invitation to all.

We have been given a way of life, given to us at the covenant on Sinai and renewed throughout history—a way of living as a people with God as our king, our head, our Sovereign One—but also how to live with one another. Our mistake often as people of faith is forgetting that how we live with others, how we treat others, especially the marginalized and oppressed—reflects our love for God. When we focus only on ourselves, and what we think is right or wrong before God’s eyes, we miss our neighbors, and therefore we miss God. If we do not love our neighbors as ourselves—if we do not see and meet their needs—we do not see God, and have missed the invitation to join with God’s people, and therefore God’s reign.

Call to Worship

Christ has shown us the way that leads to life;

**Turn our thoughts to you, O God.**

The desires of the world press upon us;

**Incline our hearts to Your Ways, O God.**

Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life;

**May we follow Jesus all our days.**

**Come, let us worship Christ together.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving God, we confess that we do not love You fully because we do not love our brothers and sisters enough. We do not meet their needs. We do not seek out the marginalized and invite them in. We do not work to lift oppression and eliminate poverty. Instead, we seek our well-being first and then, if we have time, if we have resources, if we have the will, we will help our neighbors. Turn our thinking around. Put our neighbors first, so that we see You in their faces, so that we touch Your hands when we touch theirs, that we feed You when we feed the hungry. Turn our lives around to reflect Your love, rather than our selfish ways. In the name of Christ, who gave himself up for us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The poor are always with us. The hungry are always among us. The needy are abundant. We have every opportunity to live out Christ’s love. We have every opportunity to know the love of God through the love of others. We have every opportunity to know that we are imperfect, but forgiven, because You have declared our sins forgiven. May we forgive others, and work to live into Your ways of love, justice, and peace. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, You have created the earth and the universe, and all the infinite space. What we know is measurable; what we do not know is unfathomable. Remind us of how small we are, and how great Your creation is, and the endless possibilities You have created. May we remember how small we are when we think we know it all. May we remember how great Your forgiveness is when we want to hold on to grudges. May we remember how vast Your love is when we want to withhold it from others. But may we remember that You have created us in Your image, so that we can know love, forgiveness, and most of all, hope. In the name of Christ we pray all things. Amen.