Worship Resources for March 8th, 2020—Second Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17 or Matthew 17:1-9

Narrative Lectionary: Bartimaeus Healed, Mark 10:32-52 (Psalm 34:11-14)

The Hebrew Scripture selection for this second Sunday of Lent is the call of Abram in Genesis 12:1-4a. Abram was called by God to leave everything behind that he knew, to follow God to a new land, to become a new people, a new nation. God told Abram that he would be blessed, and that Abram himself would be a blessing to the world, in that through him, all families of the world would be blessed. Since the first week of Lent began with the temptation in the garden and the arrival of sin by not following God’s ways, Abram is an example of following God’s wisdom over the foolishness of the world. It is foolish to leave one’s home and everything behind, but the wisdom of God calls Abram to follow God.

Psalm 121 is a prayer of assurance. God is not in the mountains, God is the one who made the mountains, the maker of heaven and earth. God is the one who keeps us when we are awake and asleep, is with us as we leave and as we return. God will keep us from evil, and be with us always.

Paul used Abraham’s response to God as an example of righteousness in faith in Romans 4:1-4, 13-17. Abram had no reason to believe God other than his faith, when God called him to leave his home and go to a new land, when God promised he would become the ancestor of nations. Paul argued that the law required a faithful response, as work requires wages, but Abraham’s response in faith was not required. Instead, grace is a gift freely given, not only to those who follow the law, but to all people as Abraham was the ancestor of all.

The first selection for the Gospel reading is John 3:1-17, the visit from Nicodemus. A pharisee who came to visit Jesus by night, Nicodemus knew that Jesus was sent by God, but had difficulty accepting what Jesus told him about being born from above. Nicodemus took it all quite literally, but Jesus said that one must be born from the Spirit, not just the flesh. Jesus refered to a vague story of Moses found in Numbers, of when Moses lifted up a serpent on a pole, and the people who were being bitten looked upon the serpent and were saved. Jesus called upon Nicodemus to lift his gaze from what was in front of him and to look beyond what he could see, to a life of the spirit. For Jesus came because of God’s love to save the world, not condemn the world, so that all who believe might have eternal life.

The second Gospel selection is the story of the Transfiguration, also the lectionary selection two weeks ago. In Matthew 17:1-9, Jesus, Peter, James, and John traveled up a high mountain, by themselves, and Jesus was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white and his face shining like the sun. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Peter spoke up that it was good for them to be there, and suggested making tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. But while he was speaking, a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” The disciples fell to the ground, overcome with fear. But Jesus then touched them. “Get up, and do not be afraid.” Jesus was alone, and as they walked down, Jesus told them to tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man had been raised from the dead.

The Narrative Lectionary continues in Mark, focusing on the story of Bartimaeus in Mark 10:32-52. This section begins with Jesus speaking to the twelve disciples about what will happen in Jerusalem—that he will be handed over to the religious authorities who will hand him over to the government authorities, and he will be mocked, tortured, and killed, and then on the third day will rise. James and John pulled Jesus aside to ask if they could sit at his right and left hand in glory. The other disciples became angry with James and John, but Jesus reminded them all that they are not like the Gentiles, who are worried about status and honor; rather, the greatest of all must become the servant of all, as Jesus came to them. When they approached Jericho, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus began to shout out to Jesus. While others around him ordered him to be quiet, Bartimaeus became even louder. When Jesus called for Bartimaeus, he threw off his cloak and ran to Jesus. Jesus asked him what he wanted him to do, and Bartimaeus said, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus told him his faith made him well, and Bartimaeus immediately regained his sight and followed Jesus.

Following Jesus requires us to reject the ways of the world. The way of the world calls us to a worldly caution: to make choices that help us and those immediately around us, but to protect what we have so that we can survive and have enough. The way of the world tells us that we never really have enough, and we have to have more. The way of the world tells us that living in faithfulness is about our own salvation. The way of Christ calls us to become last of all and servant of all. The way of Christ calls us to give up our possessions to share what we have with others. The way of Christ calls us to extend grace and forgiveness even when others do not deserve it. The way of Christ is the wisdom of God, and foolishness to the world, but it leads us to true life, eternal life.

Call to Worship (Psalm 121)

I lift my eyes up to the mountains, from where will my help come?

 **My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

God will not let your foot be moved, God who keeps you will not slumber.

 **God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

The Lord is your keeper, the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

 **The sun will not strike you by day nor the moon by night.**

The Lord will keep you from all evil, the Lord will keep your life.

 **The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in**

 **From this time on and forevermore.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wisdom, we come to You confessing our brokenness. We have to survive in the world we live in. At times we have to make choices that put ourselves and our families first. At times we give in to the frustrating power of this world, feeling helpless to stop what is happening. We don’t want our children or our parents, or our friends and extended family to suffer as others do, and sometimes our course of action will continue to perpetuate harm to others. Call us into accountability. Remind us that we must live for Your reign, because Your life begins now and endures forever. The ways of this world are temporary. Election cycles are temporary. Economy booms and busts are temporary. What matters to us now may be irrelevant in a generation. God, call us into Your time, the Kairos time that is not of this world. Call us into Your ways. Lead us in Your wisdom, so that all might have life in You. In the name of Jesus, who lived this life not for himself, but for all of us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s love is renewed in every moment. God’s grace is known in every breath. God is with us, now. There is no place we can go in which we are not in the presence of God. You are loved and forgiven. You do not belong to the ways of this world, you belong to love because you were created in the image of God, and God is love. Go and share this good news, that because of love, all things are possible, and all things are made new. Amen.

Prayer

Holy One, may we quiet our minds for a moment. May we remember to breathe for a moment. May we simply be for a moment. You are with us, now. In the vastness of the universe, You created us, on this one little planet. You are with us, and You are calling us by name to do something different. You are calling us to breathe, to be still, to know that You are God, that this planet is the one You made for us and all of creation that we know. May we remember. May we feel the pull of gravity. May we trust in the air we breathe. May we be renewed in our passion to care for what You have given us. Holy One, breathe into us Your spirit. Holy One, be in our heartbeat to move us to Your work. Holy One, may we remember Your presence is with us, always. Amen.