Worship Resources for March 9th, 2014—First Sunday of Lent

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

For our first Sunday of Lent, we begin with the first temptation. We learn in chapter 2 that God has told the human being (*adam* in Hebrew) not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or that *adam* will die. In chapter 3, there are two human beings, a man and a woman, but there is also a serpent who is crafty, who is able to talk, and able to trick them. This story of the first temptation and first sin reminds us that from the beginning, we have been tempted to think we know what is best. We have been tempted to think there is something more that we deserve. We have been tempted to desire the things that we do not have, and the first temptation was wisdom. Was that such a bad thing to desire? Maybe not. Maybe what was bad was all the things that came with wisdom: the knowledge of shame, guilt, and desire, which leads us away from life with God.

Psalm 32 sings of the joy of being forgiven. The psalmist describes their own experience of feeling the weight of their own sin, and the relief when they confessed their sin to God and felt the weight lift from them when they knew they were forgiven. The psalmist sings that God is the one who delivers, who protects, who fills us with the joy of deliverance and freedom of God’s love.

Romans 5:12-19 is Paul’s explanation that sin is something all have done, that Adam was the first to sin, and death was the end for those who sinned. But because of Jesus, death is defeated, conquered at the cross. Death no longer has a hold on us; sin also does not have a hold on us. Through the resurrection, through Christ, we are a new creation. Through Adam, we only have known sin and death; but through Christ, we know forgiveness and eternal life.

Matthew 4:1-11 is Matthew’s account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. After his baptism, but before his ministry began, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Think about that: Jesus was led up into the wilderness, by the Spirit of God, to be tempted by the devil. Why? Is this to show Jesus’ faithfulness? Is this to show us that we, too, will face temptation? Is this to show us that while the devil may be evil personified, the tempter may also be part of life that we have to go through—can we resist the desires of this world to seek what God desires for us? If, in the garden, the woman was tempted by the desire for wisdom beyond what she knew, is our work to resist the desires of the world for more and instead look to what God desires for us? Jesus resists the temptation of food, a quick fix to satisfy his worldly desire, instead of being hungry for God (and he had gone there to fast). Jesus resists the temptation of testing God—a temptation of “If God, you do this for me, then I will do this for you.” And Jesus resists the great temptation of desire for power. Looking to Jesus’ example, where are we called to resist temptation? If we look to what God desires for us over our own desires, can we lead a life pleasing to God?

As we enter Lent, we repent—we turn back to God. We acknowledge our sins—our shortcomings, our faults—and our temptations. We look to Jesus, who has come to free us from our worldly ways that lead us to death, and instead, leads us to forgiveness and eternal life with God. How can you turn back to God this Lent? How can you leave the ways of this world and instead, remember to look to what God desires for you? How can this time of Lent be a period of renewal in your relationship with God? How can you resist temptation and begin new life now?

Call to Worship

Turn away from the calls of worldly success

**Repent, and turn back to God.**

Turn away from the desire to have what everyone else has

**Repent, and turn back to God.**

Turn away from greed and the race for power

**Repent, and turn back to God.**

As we enter Lent, may we turn back to God

**May we seek forgiveness, may we seek healing, may we seek wholeness.**

**May our hearts be renewed in this time of worship.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we come to You confessing that we have turned away from You. We have not sought what You desire for us, but instead desire what others have. We have clamored to have worldly success, leaving behind Your ways of justice and righteousness. We have put our desires above our neighbor’s needs. We have excused ourselves from helping the marginalized and oppressed. Forgive us of our foolish, selfish ways. Call us into repentance, to turn back to You, to renew our commitment to You and to live according to Your ways of justice, righteousness, peace-making, and most of all, love. In the name of Christ, our Savior, Redeemer and Friend, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; God’s mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is God’s faithfulness. This is a new day. You are forgiven. You are loved. You are restored. Amen.

Prayer

Loving Jesus, You showed us the way into life. You resisted the temptations of the world to satisfy one’s own desires and instead looked to what God desired for you. You resisted the temptation to test God, to wait for God to act before acting in faithfulness; instead, You remained faithful to God. And You resisted the temptation for greed and power, instead living a life for others, serving the lost and the least, lifting up the poor and the oppressed, and welcoming the marginalized. May we look to You as the example for our lives. May we empty ourselves of the desires of the world and instead seek what our Creator desires for us. May we remember in You we are a new creation, and that Your intent for us is love and life. May we live into Your intention for us. In Your name we pray. Amen.