Worship Resources for April 13th, 2014—Palm/Passion Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16 or Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Philippians 2: 5-11; Matthew 21:1-11 or 26:14-27:66 or 27:11-54

For this Sunday, we have two choices: the Liturgy of the Palms, which includes Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 and Matthew 21:1-11, or the Liturgy of the Passion, which includes the four traditional readings. Or you can do a combination of both.

On this final Sunday of Lent, we begin with Isaiah’s own testimony of being a prophet for God and the cost of following God. Isaiah has experienced abuse and suffering at the hands of others, but he has not wavered in his faith and he knows that God is the one who calls out to him, who calls him forward, and who helps him and justifies him. Isaiah witnesses that he is innocent, suffering at the hands of others, but it is God who is the final judge and will set him free.

Psalm 31:9-16 contains the psalmist’s anguish. The writer is suffering greatly and is the scorn of his neighbors. He fears the plotting of enemies against him in his weakness. But the psalmist trusts in God to deliver him from his enemies, and that God will save him in the end.

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 is a song of a triumphal entry into the temple, a blessing for those who enter. The psalmist gives thanks to God and prepares the congregation for worship in this part of the psalm, a celebration of what God is doing and a celebration of their collective worship in the temple.

Philippians 2:5-11 is an ancient hymn of the early church, an early confession about Jesus’ humanity and divinity, which Paul included in his letter from prison to the church in Philippi. These words encouraged this early church, who had experienced their mentor and friend in prison, that their Savior also suffered, but that their Savior was God, who gave himself up for humanity.

Matthew 21:1-11 is Matthew’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. Matthew is the only gospel writer who has Jesus riding on both a donkey and its colt—because Matthew didn’t understand Hebrew poetry and its reflective repetition for emphasis (Luke and Mark understood this), in Zechariah 9:9. Matthew was so concerned about using scripture to prove who Jesus was that he was willing to change the details of the story and make Jesus look—well, rather silly for us.

In both the long passage of Matthew 26-27 and the short passage of just 27, Matthew’s account of the betrayal, arrest, conviction and crucifixion of Jesus, is the only story that shows Judas’ remorse and contains Judas’ suicide. It also shows interesting characters not found or not elaborated on in other gospel accounts—such as Pilate’s wife and her dream, or Barabbas who was also known as Jesus, making an interesting juxtaposition: who do you want released, Jesus the one known as a Messiah, or Jesus the one known as a rebel in the insurrection? Which do you want, Jesus who is fighting for his people, or Jesus who is calling us to love and willing to go to the cross for love?

Call to Worship

Like the crowds, we call out “Hosanna, God Save Us!”

**Jesus, our Savior, save us from sin and death.**

Like the crowds, we cry out, “Crucify Him!”

**Jesus, our Savior, save us from sin and death.**

Like Peter and the others, we deny God and scatter.

**Jesus, our Savior, save us from sin and death.**

Like Judas, we fall to the temptation of wealth and power.

**Jesus, our Savior, save us from sin and death.**

Save us, O Christ, forgive us and call us into life.

**In this time of worship, may we remember**

**May we repent, and may we seek You anew. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy Jesus, we confess that we all have, at times, betrayed You. We all have, at times, doubted You. We all have, at times, denied You. We all have, at times, chosen another savior to follow, to put our trust in—whether it is money, or a politician, or our own success—we have deserted You and Your ways. Forgive us. Help us to turn back to You, the One who died for us all, that death may have no power over us and that eternity would reign in our hearts instead of the right-now. In Your name, our Savior Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Lamentations 3:22-23)

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. God forgives. God restores. God sets our feet on right paths. God journeys with us, and sees us through to the end and beyond. Know that you are not alone, and that God is with you, even when you stumble and turn away, and God will help lead you home. Amen.

Prayer

Author of Life, on this day we remember how the people came, shouting “Hosanna, Save Us!” and we cry out to You to save us. Save us from the ways of this world that pull us away from relationships, that put wealth and success above people. Save us from the ways of this world that turn our relationship with You into a set of rules and checklists to live by. Save us from the ways of this world that water down Your sacrifice into being only about getting ourselves into heaven, instead of transforming our lives to live for others and even to lay down our own lives for the sake of Your love, justice and mercy. In the name of Christ, who continually lays down His life for us, so that we might have new life now, we pray all things. Amen.