Worship Resources for April 2, 2017—Fifth Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Narrative Lectionary: Zacchaeus, Luke 18:31-19:10 (Psalm 84:1-4, 10-12 or vs. 10)

The prophet Ezekiel has a powerful vision when God calls upon him to prophesy to the dry bones. The people who have experienced utter despair in the exile, the end of all hope, will experience God’s restoration. There is nothing God cannot do, and even when they are all dried up and feeling there is no hope left, God will bring them up out of the death of exile into new life with God.

The psalmist cries out from the depths of despair in Psalm 130, knowing that God can and will forgive sins and bring restoration and healing. The psalmist knows their hope is in God alone, whom their soul thirsts for and will not stop longing for until God redeems the people.

Paul speaks of living according to the Spirit in Romans 8:6-11. When we belong to Christ, the Spirit dwells within us, and the ways of sin are dead to us and does not have a hold on us. Rather, the Spirit of life lives in us and leads us to righteousness, right-living; and the Spirit of life will raise us to new life

Jesus travels to Bethany in John 11, but is delayed along the way, and Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, dies after an illness. Though there is danger in going too close to Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples travel there anyway. Both Mary and Martha are distraught at their brother’s death, but Martha boldly declares that she believes in the resurrection, and Jesus declares he is the resurrection and the life. However, Mary’s grief is what moves Jesus to weep, and then travel to the tomb to call Lazarus out from death. Through Lazarus, Jesus is able to show the promise of resurrection that will be for all who believe in Christ, for they will not die, but live. However, by coming to Bethany, Jesus draws the attention of both the religious and political leaders, who now not only have to deal with the people turning to Jesus, but now Lazarus as proof that the dead can be raised, and it proves to be a risk for both of them.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the story of Zacchaeus. Jesus was traveling to Jericho, approaching Jerusalem, and knew that he would be handed over to the authorities and put to death, but the disciples did not understand. Along the way, Jesus heals a blind man, whom the crowds tried to silence and hide away. Jesus heals him, and he is able to see again. The blind man, once shunned and silenced by society, now rejoices in his restoration.

When he enters Jericho, Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree to get Jesus’ attention. We don’t know for certain, as it isn’t mentioned, but it appears Zacchaeus has encountered Jesus before, and that he is a changed man. Or perhaps Zacchaeus knew that Jesus would understand his story: a tax collector shunned by his neighbors. Instead, Zacchaeus invites Jesus to come to his house, even though he knew it would be scandalous for Jesus to do so, and he also shows he repays anyone he may have defrauded and gives away half of his possessions to the poor. Zacchaeus has not only heard the words of Jesus, but taken them to heart and lives them out.

Psalm 84:1-4, 10-12 speaks of where God dwells, a place where even the birds of the air find a home. Finding home with God, even for a short time, is better than anywhere else. God dwells in hospitality and welcome, for there is found great joy.

Restoration. Hope. Healing. Belonging. Welcome. This is where God dwells, and God dwells in us when we seek these things and live them out. For we have become the body of Christ in this world, and the Spirit dwells in us. Where the Spirit lives, there is life. So welcome, show hospitality, embrace the stranger, comfort the afflicted, become living hope—and help bring God’s restoration to the world.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 84)

How lovely is the dwelling place of God!

**Our soul longs for the home of God,**

**and we sing with joy to the living God.**

Happy are those who find their home with God,

**We sing the praise of God,**

**And in our heart we know the way to God.**

For a day in the home of God is better than a thousand elsewhere;

**For all are happy who trust in God.**

**Come, let us worship God, who is with us now. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God, You came to Abraham as strangers on the road, and he welcomed You into his home. Forgive us when we have not been welcoming of strangers. Forgive us when we have looked upon others with suspicion based on stereotypes and fear. Forgive us when we have allowed prejudice to creep into our hearts. Forgive us when we have not lived into Your ways of love and hospitality. Forgive us, and correct our errors. Cleanse us of our faults, and help us to live in Your ways of love, peace, justice, and hospitality. In the name of Christ, who welcomes all in his name. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God knows we make mistakes. We are, after all, still children of God, not adults. We see in a glass darkly. We cannot see the full picture of who we will become. But God knows us, and God knows our potential, and God forgives us. God will lead you into the right paths. Trust in God, know you are forgiven, and go, live into God’s ways, and welcome all of God’s children. Amen.

Prayer

Teaching God, instruct us in Your ways. Lead us with Your wisdom. Help us to turn to the scriptures and through prayer seek Your guidance. Remind us that we never have it fully right, and that we always have room for improvement. Guide us to study and learn, so that we may gain new insight and live as Your disciples in this world, sharing the Good News in all we have learned, and teaching others in Your ways. In the name of Jesus our Rabbi, our Redeemer, and our Friend, we pray. Amen.