Worship Resources for April 12th, 2015—Second Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

Narrative Lectionary: Great Commission, Matthew 28:16-20 (Psalm 40:9-10)

We begin in Acts with the early church. The early church was truly a community that cared for each other’s needs. Mirroring a similar passage at the end of Acts 2, they held everything in common, and all their land was sold and the proceeds brought and distributed among them as each had need. This was what it meant to be the body of Christ in the early years—to truly see each other as kindred in the eyes of God, as part of one another.

Psalm 133 sings praises for kinship and unity found among the people of God. When people gather together and find unity and kinship, it is like an anointing, an offering of praise to God. The psalmist knows that when the people of God actually act like the people of God, we know the blessings of God more fully.

Throughout the Easter season the Lectionary follows 1 John for the Epistle reading, and we begin 1 John by the understanding that God has brought forth life, and that life has been revealed to be eternal life. The invitation is with all to be part of the fellowship of Jesus Christ. The writer reminds us that if we say we do not have sin, we have deceived ourselves, but if we confess our sins we know that Christ will forgive us. The writer would rather we acknowledge our sins and seek forgiveness, knowing in Christ we are forgiven, then to lie and say we do not sin.

We continue the story of the Resurrection in John 20:19-31. We find the disciples have gathered in secret the very evening of the same day that Mary declared to them that Jesus has risen, but they still have not seen him yet. Then Jesus appears to them, even though their doors are locked, and the first words Jesus imparts to them are “Peace be with you.” He also tells them to receive the Holy Spirit and he breathes on them. But Thomas is not among them. Thomas refuses to believe unless he can touch his side and see the nails in his hands. It isn’t until Jesus appears before Thomas that he truly understands. While Thomas is often called “Doubting Thomas” in our culture, in many ways he is a relatable character because we all have times of doubt and questions, and indeed, the Resurrection is one of the most difficult things to believe in, that someone could be raised from the dead.

The Narrative Lectionary follow’s Matthew’s account and the Great Commission. Here, we also read that that were other disciples who doubted as well, not just Thomas as in John’s account. Jesus tells the disciples to go forth into the world and make disciples of all nations and to baptize them. Jesus declares that the Good News is now for everyone, and they are to teach as they have been taught by him, and to also know that Jesus is always with them.

Psalm 40:9-10 is the psalmist’s declaration that they will speak boldly of God’s deliverance in the congregation and that they will not hide it. God calls us to declare what we know, to share what we know, to live out what we know. This is not something we keep for ourselves. Our faith is not ours alone.

We are called to declare boldly what we have experienced, what we know, and what we believe. But we know that there are times we doubt, where we are just not certain. Doubt is not the opposite of faith; rather, doubt is a part of the faith journey and ebbs and flows within us. But we know that when waves of doubt are crashing around us, faith will return. We must trust in that, and help one another.

Call to Worship

Doubters, like Thomas—you are welcome here!

 **O Lord, increase our faith!**

Deniers, like Peter—you are welcome here!

 **O Lord, help us to believe!**

Betrayers, like Judas—you are welcome here!

 **O Lord, forgive us of our sins!**

Believers and doubters, deniers and betrayers,

 **God offers us forgiveness. God loves us and restores us.**

Come, let us worship God together,

 **In the house of God we know great mercy and love. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have fallen short. We have been stubborn and short-tempered, selfish and close-minded. We have made You into our image and when that image has failed us, we have lost faith. Forgive our foolish ways. Guide us in Your ways. May we love one another so we can experience Your love. May we care for one another so we can experience Your care. May we forgive one another so we can experience Your forgiveness. In the name of Christ Jesus, who has lived our human life, died for all of us, and lives again for all, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is always doing a new thing. God has created a new community, in which we belong to one another, in which we are dependent upon on another. We are needed. We are worthy. We are loved, all because Christ has loved us, Christ has called us, and Christ forgives us. Go forth with courage, strength, and renewed faith. Amen.

Prayer

Wondrous Love, You continue to enter our lives in new ways, and we continue to experience Your work in the created world around us. We see restoration and new life all around. Help us to grasp hold of this newness in finding new ways of sharing Your love, of caring for those in need, of seeking justice for the marginalized and oppressed in our communities and around the world. May we feel Your call in the newness of life around us and follow You all of our days. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.