Worship Resources for April 12th, 2020—Easter Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10

Narrative Lectionary: Resurrection, Mark 16:1-8 (Psalm 118:21-27)

On Easter Sunday, the Revised Common Lectionary begins with Peter’s revelation that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead and that all who believe have forgiveness of sins through his name. Preceding these verses, Peter beheld a vision where God called him to eat of animals that were considered unclean, and God showed Peter that what God has called clean he must not call profane. As Peter recognized that Christ died for all, the ministry to and among the Gentiles began.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks a word of hope to those about to go into exile in Jeremiah 31:1-6. An alternative to the Acts passage, Jeremiah speaks of a unity among the people, that God is the God of all tribes. The people have found grace and hope, and God has remained faithful to the people even as they go into exile. The people shall return one day and will celebrate. Their vineyards shall be planted again, and the people will be called to worship God.

The psalm reading echoes the reading from Palm Sunday, using the same first two verses of 118 and an overlapping portion of the previous reading, this week using 14-24. As the psalmist calls the people to enter the temple to worship, this portion highlights the promise that the faithful will not die, but will live. God is the one who will save the people; God will be with those who have been rejected.

This short portion from Colossians speaks of setting our minds on things that are above, if we have been raised with Christ in 3:1-4. Christ is our life, and when Christ is revealed, the faithful will be revealed with Christ in glory.

*(The alternative Epistle reading is also Acts 10:34-43).*

The first selection from the Gospels is John’s account of Jesus’ resurrection in 20:1-18. In this account, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb alone while it was still dark, and found the stone had been removed. She left to find Simon Peter and the beloved disciple, who hurried back to the tomb to see for themselves. Peter entered first, then the beloved disciple, who saw and believed. However, they didn’t understand—the linen wrappings were there, but the body was gone. They both returned home and left Mary behind, weeping at the tomb. She did not recognize the man in the garden that she assumed was the gardener, until he said her name—then she recognized the Teacher Jesus. Jesus told Mary not to hold on to him, because he had not yet ascended, but to go on to the disciples and tell them. Mary went to them, declaring she had seen the Lord.

The second selection from the Gospels is Matthew’s account in 28:1-10. This is the only account in which the stone still blocked the tomb, but Mary Magdalene and the other Mary witnessed an angel rolling back the stone and sitting on it, frightening the guards to death. The angel told both Mary’s not to be afraid, that Jesus who was crucified was not there but had risen. They saw the place where he laid, then went quickly to tell the disciples. But on the way, they encountered the risen Christ. They took hold of his feet and worshiped him, but Jesus told them to not be afraid, to tell the disciples to go on to Galilee, where they would see him.

The Narrative Lectionary follows Mark’s account of the resurrection in 16:1-8. Thought by scholars to be the earliest version, this account has Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James, and Salome going to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus’ body. They went to the tomb after the sun had risen, wondering who would roll away the stone—but it was already rolled away. They entered the tomb and found a man dressed in white, who told them that Jesus whom they were looking for wasn’t there—he had been raised. He told the women to tell the disciples to go on ahead to Galilee, but the women ran away, saying nothing to anyone, for terror and amazement had seized them and they were afraid.

Psalm 118:21-27 (overlapping with this week and last week’s Revised Common Lectionary psalm reading) is the call of the congregation to enter the temple of God, to rejoice, to know God’s steadfast love has claimed them. The stone that was rejected became the chief cornerstone. The congregation is called to go up to the altar, with festal branches in celebration.

Christ is Risen! It is strange to celebrate the resurrection while most of us are still staying indoors. However, even in those early encounters of the risen Christ, it was often when they were in small groups, or like Mary, completely alone. In John’s account, Jesus told Mary not to hold on to him yet, as he had not yet ascended. The resurrection has begun, but the completion, the fulfillment of all that God has made, is still becoming. For now, we have to be satisfied with the glimpses we have of the resurrection in our life, but proclaim boldly like Mary, that we have seen the Lord.

Call to Worship

**The stone was rolled away.**

**Christ is Risen!**

**The tomb was found empty.**

**Christ is Risen!**

**The angel said, “Do not be afraid.”**

**Christ is Risen!**

**No matter where we are, we proclaim now and always,**

**Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We confess to You, O Risen Christ, that we need resurrection more than ever. We need new life now. Guide us to find the seeds of new life in the midst of the world we are in. Call us to perceive where the stone is being rolled away. Break us open to the world even while we keep ourselves safe. Remind us that the resurrection, the new life in You, begins here and now with us. Help us to boldly declare that Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, Indeed. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God whispers in our hearts, “Do not be afraid.” All things will be made new. All things will begin again. Hold on to the new life in Christ, and know that love and life are yours, now and always. Go share the good news of Christ’s resurrection. Amen.

Prayer

God of All Seasons, we are reminded that Your time is not our time. As we are in the midst of a difficult season, resurrection is at hand. In a time when we are called to stay indoors, we shout out loud that Christ is Risen. We wander in the darkness of uncertainty, wondering when restrictions will be lifted. We remember how the women discovered the stone was rolled away. We remember those who gathered at the tomb, their trembling and fear, their wonder and amazement. We remember their witness in the face of the unknown. Be bold in us, O God, to proclaim the resurrection now. Be bold in us, O God, to live out our faith by doing our part to care for our neighbors and loved ones. Be bold in us, O God, to trust in a future with hope that is beyond what we can perceive right now. Be bold in us, O God, to proclaim that Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen Indeed, and that the season of new life and resurrection has begun. Amen!