Worship Resources for April 15, 2018—Third Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

Narrative Lectionary: Paul’s Conversion, Acts 9:1-19a (Matthew 6:24)

In the passage from Acts 3, Peter and John have called upon a man begging at the gate of the temple, who was born lame from birth, to stand up in the name of Jesus. The people are astonished, filled with wonder and amazement (verse 10). Peter addresses the crowd, and declares that the same God of their ancestors is the God who is at work in Jesus, who was crucified, and raised from the dead. Peter states that they killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead—but it is wise for us to remember that this is the same Peter who denied Christ during his trial. Peter may be pointing the finger at the crowd, but he is also pointing the finger at himself. Peter says he knows they acted in ignorance as did the rulers, but now, he calls upon them to repent and turn to God.

The psalmist demands for God to answer their prayer in Psalm 4. The psalmist pleads to God, but also turns to the people and calls upon them to put their trust in God, to not sin and listen to God. The psalmist calls upon the people to put their trust in God, and declares that God hears their prayers, for God is the one who provides for their safety.

The writer of first John declares that through God’s love, we are now called children of God. We will become something new through God, but we don’t know what it is yet; only that we will become like God (just as we were made in the image of God). In Christ there is no sin, and Christ takes away our sin. Those who abide in sin do not abide in God, so Christ has come to take away our sins, so that we might live in righteousness.

The appearance of Jesus to the disciples at the end of Luke is similar to the appearance story in John’s gospel account, in that Jesus comes to them, and some of them have doubts. Jesus tells them to touch and see that he is not a ghost, but is real. Jesus, as he did with the two on the road to Emmaus, opens their minds to the scriptures to understand that he is the fulfillment of the scriptures, and they are now witnesses of this new revelation.

The Narrative Lectionary turns to the apostle Paul and the story of his conversion in Acts. Note that Paul’s personal account in Galatians 1:13-17 differs from this account, and even in Acts, the details are changed in later retellings in chapter 22 and 26. However, what we know is this: Paul had some encounter with the risen Christ that changed him from a man who persecuted Christians to a believer. Acts refers to him as Saul until 13:9, where it begins referring to him as Paul. Paul is simply the Roman form of the name Saul. In this story in Acts, Saul has a vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus, where Jesus asks Paul why he is persecuting him. Jesus also calls Ananias to go and minister to Saul after this encounter, and though Ananias is not keen on going to see Saul, known for persecuting the early church, he obeys Christ and ministers to him. During this time, Saul had been unable to see, but the scales fell from his eyes, his sight was restored, and he was baptized.

Matthew 6:24, the supporting verse listed in the Narrative Lectionary, is a teaching of Jesus that no one can serve two masters, and that one cannot serve God and wealth. For both Saul and Ananias, they had to serve Christ, not their own interests.

All of us have had our own experiences of the risen Christ. Some have great conversion stories like Paul. Others of us have come to know Christ through the love of others, who have shown us the love of God. Some of us grew up in the church and have always known God, but may feel out of place when talking with others about their experience of God, because there was never a time they didn’t know God. Our experiences of the risen Christ are often personal; however, they can be communal. When we share God’s love with one another and do what we can to build up the reign of God on earth, the beloved community, we can have a communal experience of the risen Christ. Christ is with us as we work for justice, with us as we love one another, with us as we baptize, bury, and celebrate life and resurrection.

Call to Worship

Behold, what love God has for us!

**We are the children of God.**

The world does not understand,

**Because the world still does not know God.**

Christ has shared God’s love for us through his life, death, and resurrection;

**We are called to share God’s love with one another.**

Come, worship Christ, for we are the children of God;

**May we be filled with God’s love, and share God’s love with the world. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Author of Life, we confess we have written our own version of the story, that does not align with You. We have made excuses for selfish behavior, justified putting ourselves first, and creatively interpreted Scripture to ignore those in need around us. Forgive us for not looking to Your intention for our lives. Forgive us for not seeking Your intention as we interpret Scripture. Forgive us for not understanding Your intention when we refuse to recognize who our neighbors are. Forgive us of our sins. Restore us by filling us with Your wisdom and insight, to understand our role in the book of life, to live out Your love in this world. We pray in Your name, Author of Salvation. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God. Know God’s love, and you will know God’s forgiveness. Love one another, and you will know God’s love. Live in the ways of love, and you will know God’s love in your life. Forgive each other, and seek reconciliation and peace wherever possible. Amen.

Prayer

God of Wisdom, call to us from the crossroads of life to hear Your voice. Call us to turn away from the folly of the world’s ways and to walk in the ways of insight. Help us to trust Your voice, to trust what we have been taught that is rooted in love, and to question what we have been taught that is rooted in dominance and control. Help us to break the chains of oppression and injustice, to seek the well-being of others, and to live by Your ways of love, justice, and peace. Amen.