Worship Resources for April 17, 2017—Fourth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

Narrative Lectionary: Church at Thessalonica, Acts 17:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (Mark 13:9-11)

In the Easter season, we read the Resurrection of Dorcas in Acts 9:36-43. There are only a few resurrection stories in the New Testament, besides the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection: Lazarus (John 11), Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:35-43) and Eutychus, who falls asleep at a window and falls to his death in Acts 20:7-12. Dorcas is also the first woman to be called a disciple. Dorcas ministered among the widows and made clothes for them. However, she dies after falling ill. Peter prays, alone with her body, and she opens her eyes, and the miracle of her resurrection becomes known and many believe because of her resurrection.

Psalm 23 is the most well-known psalm, of comfort and assurance of God’s presence when facing trials, enemies, even death—God is the one who is always right beside us, who leads us into safety and still waters, green pastures and tables with overflowing cups of goodness and mercy that are with us all the days of our life.

John of Patmos speaks of a vision beheld of God’s beloved community, that includes all people of all languages and races and cultures, more than anyone can count, who come together to worship and praise God. They have come through “the great ordeal” and still they praise God, though many have faced persecution, trial, and martyrdom.

Jesus, when asked by some of the people of Jerusalem near the temple if he was the Messiah, said, “My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me.” In other words, in John 10:22-30, one can tell that Jesus is from God by his life, and that one is drawn to him because of the work Jesus is doing in the world. If they doubt or question that Jesus is from God, they doubt and question the good works that Jesus, and others in his name, are doing. And nothing Jesus will say will convince them because he does not fit the image of the Messiah that some are looking for. He is not a worldly king. He is the embodiment of God’s love in the world.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the church in Thessalonica, beginning with Acts 17:1-9. According to Acts, there were people in the synagogue that heard what Paul and Silas were saying about Jesus, and began to believe. So did many of the women, and some of the Greeks who were monotheists and were gathering with the Jews in Thessalonica. A riot broke out, and Jason, who was accused of hosting Paul and Silas was arrested along with others, accused of saying there was another king named Jesus, to get them in trouble with the local authorities, but the city officials recognize this was an internal, religious struggle, and after Jason and others post bail, they let them go.

Paul praises the church in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, especially for the witness they have given other churches by their welcome, and Paul in particular mentions that they have turned from idols to worship God, which suggests the church was based more in the Greek population rather than Jews who converted. Their faith in God has become known to other churches, and encourages and inspires them.

Jesus warns the disciples in Mark 13:9-11 that they will face persecution and even violence—both in the religious centers as well as the government. Jesus informs them that they are witnessing for him when they do this, and the Holy Spirit will give them the words to say, and that the good news will be proclaimed to all nations.

We hear the voice of Jesus, the call to follow. We hear the voice of Jesus, the call to love our neighbor and to serve those in need around us, especially the oppressed and marginalized. We hear the voice of Jesus that calls us to speak out against violence and hate, racism and fear. We are his sheep, and we know his voice—his voices calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and it is not always popular. It sometimes leads us into dangerous situations. It sometimes causes people to hate us. Sometimes we make God into our own image, rather than finding the image of Christ in the faces of one another.

Call to Worship

We hear the voice of God calling,

 **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

We feel the Spirit moving among us,

 **Moving us to acts of compassion and justice.**

We know the love of Jesus,

 **We love because Christ first loved us.**

Come, worship God together.

 **Come, let us serve our God, who calls us by name.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Compassionate God, break us open when we have hardened our hearts. Break us open to reach out to those who are marginalized. Break us open to see injustice around us. Break us open to know our neighbors, those who live on the streets as well as comfortable houses; those who speak a different language as well as the tongue we know; the ones who believe differently as well as the ones who sit next to us as we worship You, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is doing something new, and it is pushing through and breaking forth. Nothing can stop it, neither drought or flood, spring winds or late winter snow. God is breaking into our lives in a new way. Can you not feel it? Open yourself to what God is doing in our world, and in your life, and know that you are beloved by God. You are forgiven. Listen to God, and follow Jesus in the world. Amen.

Prayer

Director of our steps, You have called us forth into this world, called us into the movement for justice, and the dance of life. Help us to follow Your choreography, to know our part by heart, so that we can fully trust in Your work and be free to feel the music You have written, that is playing all around us. Partner with us, so that we know Your presence is beside us, in every moment, in every movement. Guide our lives; direct our steps; lead us in the dance of life. Amen.