Worship Resources for April 19th, 2020—Second Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Narrative Lectionary: You Shall Be My Witnesses, Acts 1:1-14 (Mark 6:7-13)

For the season of Easter, the Revised Common Lectionary begins with passages from Acts that proclaim the Risen Christ. The selection from Acts 2 is Peter’s bold declaration on the day of Pentecost to the witnesses of the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter tells those gathered that Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was crucified, was raised up by God. Peter interprets the Hebrew scriptures to say that David foresaw the resurrection and that Jesus is his descendant, to be on the throne forever. Peter proclaims that all who witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit on that day of Pentecost are witnesses of the resurrection.

The psalmist offers a personal prayer to God in Psalm 16, remembering God’s deliverance and blessings. The psalmist warns against choosing other gods and following their ways, for their ways lead to sorrow. God is the one who gives counsel and instruction, gladdens the heart and leads us in the path to life and blessing.

The writer of 1 Peter 1:3-9 speaks of a new birth into living hope through Christ’s resurrection. Writing to a generation that did not have witnesses of the resurrection living among them, the writer speaks of having love and faith despite not having seen Christ themselves. They know the indescribable joy of salvation in Jesus Christ because of their authentic faith.

The context of John 20:19-21 must be carefully examined due to the antisemitic interpretations that have been used throughout Christian history. Jesus and his disciples were all Jewish. The Johannian community was still primarily Jewish, but they were at odds with other Jewish groups at that time.

While the crucifixion narratives in the Gospels all have similar details, the post-resurrection encounters vary widely. But Matthew and John both have in common that some of the disciples doubted. John’s post-resurrection account in this passage focuses on Thomas, who earlier in John 11 was willing to go to the death with Jesus. Now, he is unwilling to believe the resurrection unless he sees Jesus and his scars. Written to a generation most likely without living witnesses of the resurrection, John records Jesus stating “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

The Narrative Lectionary follows Acts with the account of Jesus’ ascension in Acts 1:1-14. Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, who hoped that Jesus might tell them when the kingdom would be restored to Israel. Jesus tells them this is not for them to know, but only God knows. Instead, the Holy Spirit will come upon them soon, and they will be witnesses to the whole earth. As Jesus ascends into heaven, two angels remind the disciples that they shouldn’t be staring up into the sky, but rather know that Jesus will return. The male disciples gather in Jerusalem along with the women followers of Jesus, and Jesus’ mother Mary, where they devoted themselves to prayer.

Mark 6:7-13 contains Jesus’ mission for the twelve disciples, sending them out two by two to go minister among the people, taking nothing with them and relying on the hospitality of others. The disciples called upon the people to repent, and they cast out demons and healed many who were sick.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” In our Covid-19 world, many of us have not been able to see one another. We may have a hard time seeing hope right now. But we see hope in the number of people making masks for others to wear. We see hope in the neighbors who are helping their neighbors. We see hope in the numbers finally starting to taper off in areas where there were breakouts of Covid-19. Resurrection, new life is all around us. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe. We will be together again.

Responsive or Unison Call to Worship (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

**So we do not lose heart.**

**Even though our outer nature is wasting away,**

**Our inner nature is being renewed day by day.**

**For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us**

**For an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,**

**Because we look at not what can be seen, but at what cannot be seen.**

**For what can be seen is temporary,**

**But what cannot be seen is eternal.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that it has been too much. There is too much loss, too much fear, too much grief, too much despair. There’s only so much we can handle and it is overwhelming us. Help us, O God, to let go of the fear that holds us in its grip and instead cling to hope. Help us, O God, to acknowledge our doubts, and yet to trust in You, to know that You are with us, and we are not alone. Help us, O God, to have faith that this too shall come to pass. Guide us in this time of uncertainty to focus on You, our Rock and our Redeemer. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Christ is the one who died on the cross, but also laid in the tomb of death for three days. Christ knows our fears, what it is like to feel trapped, what it is like to live without hope. And yet, Christ rose, and we will rise. Christ lives, and we live now and forever. Christ loves us, and calls us to love one another. Live into this hope by loving one another, and trusting that Christ is with us, through all things, and will see us through. Amen.

Prayer

Impossible God, You make all things possible. You make all things new. You called forth light when Your Spirit hovered over the waters, and there was light. You breathed into dirt and brought forth humanity. You raised Christ from the tomb. You continue to bring forth life out of death. You raise flowers from the earth after the cold winter. We know You will bring forth life again. In this time, may we deepen our trust in You. May we strengthen our faith in humanity that love can overcome fear and hate. May we broaden our understanding of love to all who are in need. May we rise from this time with lessons learned and strive to build a better society of kindness and caring. May we remember those who are risking their lives to save lives, and those who are keeping our society running and making it possible to have food and vital services. May we our part to ensure their health and safety now and in the time to come by working for justice for all, for living wages for all, for healthcare for all. Impossible God, may we learn that nothing is impossible with You. We can change the world because of You. We can love one another without hate because of You. We can become a new creation because of You. Remind us, teach us, and guide us. Amen.