Worship Resources for April 20th, 2014—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

We begin the readings for Resurrection Sunday with Peter’s proclamation in Acts 10:34-43 after a vision he receives from God, that God’s love through Jesus Christ is for all people, Gentiles and Jews, and that Peter and others are witnesses of Jesus, they ate and drank with him after the resurrection. They are witnesses of God’s Good News for all the people, that through Jesus there is forgiveness of sins for those who believe in Christ.

Jeremiah 31:1-6 speaks to the people of Israel, that God’s love is faithful and God will lead them out of the exile. There will be building, there will be dancing, there will be dancing and rejoicing again among the people, who will be called the people of God. The people will be called to go up to the city, to Zion, to rejoice in what God has done.

The reading from Psalm 118 overlaps with the reading from Palm Sunday, including some of the same verses. The psalmist sings of the joy of entering the temple, of the faithfulness of God, that those who have experienced rejection are accepted, included, and embraced by God. The psalmist sings “I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord” (vs. 17) and we are reminded that in those moments when we feel we are in God’s presence, we are most alive, and we know that life is eternal with God.

Colossians 3:1-4 is a very short passage about setting our minds on God and living for God rather than living for ourselves. Because we die to the world and rise with Christ. We die to the ways of the world, looking to our own success and self-worth, and live anew for Christ, living for our neighbors and for God’s ways.

John 20:1-18 is the only account in the Gospels in which Mary Magdalene is by herself, no other women are with her. She finds the tomb empty and runs to get Simon Peter and “the beloved disciple” (only found in John’s account). The beloved disciples sees the empty tomb and believes, but Simon Peter seems to have not known what happened and the disciples return to their homes. But Mary stays, weeping by the tomb, wondering where Jesus’ body has been taken. Two angels appear to her, and then Jesus himself appears to her, but she still believes that Jesus’ body has been taken away, as she does not recognize who Jesus is, until he says her name. It says she supposes him to be the gardener (vs. 15). She just does not assume it can be Jesus, because Jesus is dead. Perhaps to pair with the Thomas passage later in 19-31, it appears the lesson from Mary is that one cannot see unless they believe.

Matthew 28:1-10 is an account in which an angel rolls back the stone before Mary Magdalene and the other Mary’s very eyes. They experience an earthquake and see the angel actually move the stone away. The guards are afraid and shake before them, but the angels tell the women to not be afraid, for Jesus is not there; he has been raised. The women run to tell the disciples, with fear but also with great joy.

Each Gospel account of the resurrection is very different. In Mark’s, the women are afraid and run away, saying nothing to everyone. In Luke’s version, there are several women present, and they are perplexed, wondering what has happened as they find the stone rolled way. Matthew and John have their own nuances, and each Gospel has the timing a little different that morning, whether it was still dark or the sun had already risen.

We have a difficult task on Easter Sunday—to tell the old, old story once again. Sometimes we try to find something new; sometimes we just want to tell the Good News one more time. However you approach this day, remember that there will be those who will have heard this story several times and those who may be hearing it for the first time. There will be friends and visitors along with regulars. There will be lifelong believers and those who come on the holidays and people who may never ever set foot in a church again—how do you share the Good News to all?

Call to Worship

The stone is rolled away

 **Christ is Risen!**

The shroud is removed

 **Christ is Risen!**

The tomb is empty

 **Christ is Risen!**

Tell the good news

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

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we hear the Good News but do not always receive it. We say we believe it but struggle to live it out. We look for signs of eternal life around us but fail to trust in the new life given to us now. Forgive us for our short-sightedness and narrow way of understanding. Open our hearts and minds to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ in our daily lives, that we might live eternally. In the name of our Savior we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Christ is Risen! There is new life everywhere. There is Good News everywhere. There is nothing lost that cannot be found, no dark place where light cannot shine, no awful past that cannot lead to a bright future. You are God’s beloved; you are a child of the resurrection. Live into the hope and promise of Christ, knowing you are forgiven and loved. Amen.

Prayer

Loving Savior, lead us into life. Lead us when we have doubts and struggles; lead us when we are at peace and feel Your presence around us. Lead us away from the temptations of the world to live for ourselves; lead us to live out Your commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. Lead us on, Savior Shepherd, out of the darkness of death into Your eternal light. Amen and Amen.