Worship Resources for April 21st, 2019—Easter Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

Narrative Lectionary: Easter, Matthew 28:1-10 (Psalm 118:19-24)

We begin the celebration of resurrection with a selection from Acts, as the Revised Common Lectionary will use selections from Acts as the first reading throughout the season of Easter (this passage is also an alternative for the Epistle reading). Peter’s bold proclamation of God showing no judgment to any nation comes after his dream and encounter with a Roman centurion. Peter understands that the message of Christ was not just for the people of Judea and Galilee, but for the whole world, for Jew and Gentile alike. Peter declares that he and others were witnesses of Christ’s death and resurrection, and Jesus’ commandment is to preach and testify to the people who Christ is.

An alternative to the reading from Acts is Isaiah 65:17-25, the vision of the prophet Isaiah. As the people are returning from exile, the prophet realizes that they are starting to fall back into their old patterns. Isaiah has a vision of God creating a new heaven and a new earth, where the former things are remembered no more. The prophet sees a new Jerusalem, where people will grow old, where they will not have their homes and fields taken from them again. A place where predator and prey eat together, and peace will prevail.

The selection from Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, overlaps a little with Palm Sunday’s reading from the same psalm. As the psalmist addresses the congregation entering the temple, the psalmist declares that they shall not die, but they shall live. Though the congregation has suffered, God has not given them over to death, and now, the righteous shall enter the gate of God. The people who were rejected are now the foundation of God’s reign.

Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 that if it is only for this life that we had hope in Christ, we have missed out, for Christ has been raised from the dead. Paul uses the image of Adam as the first human being, and that all die as Adam died, but through Christ, all will live. Christ reigns until all enemies are under his feet, including death, destroyed forever (Fun fact: verse 26 is the epitaph on James and Lily Potter’s grave in Harry Potter).

We have two choices of resurrection accounts for the Revised Common Lectionary: the first is from John, and Mary Magdalene has gone to the tomb alone while it is still dark. She sees the stone is rolled away from the tomb, but does not go inside—instead, she goes and tells Peter and the beloved disciple. They both come running—the beloved disciple arrives first, but Peter goes in the tomb before him. However, the beloved disciple is the first to believe. But the disciples return to their homes, while Mary stands by in the garden, weeping. At first she sees two people in dazzling white, who ask her why she is crying—she replies that they have taken her Lord, and she doesn’t know where he is. Then she mistakes the risen Christ for the gardener until he speaks her name. Once she recognizes Jesus, she announces to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.”

Luke’s account of the resurrection has the women arriving at the tomb at early dawn, ready to anoint Jesus’ body. They find the stone rolled away, and see two men in dazzling clothes. They ask the women, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen. They remind the women of what Jesus told them in Galilee. But the men do not believe them. Only Peter at least seems amazed at what has happened, having decided to take a peek himself at the empty tomb.

The Narrative Lectionary follows Matthew’s resurrection account, in which Mary Magdalene and the other Mary arrive at the tomb. Only in Matthew’s account is there a great earthquake, and an angel appears to roll away the stone. The angel tells them to go tell the disciples what they have seen, and as they leave to tell the disciples, they are the first to encounter the risen Christ.

The psalmist declares that the righteous may enter the temple of God in Psalm 118:19-24. The ones rejected have now become the foundation of God’s reign, and they celebrate that this day God has made for them, and they are welcomed into God’s home.

In all accounts of the resurrection, the women are the first to arrive, the first to see the angels, the first to know that Christ has risen from the dead. In Matthew and John, Mary Magdalene is the first to experience the risen Christ. They declare the impossible. They stand in the face of those who say death has the final word and declare that Christ is Risen. They stand in the face of fear and declare that the movement isn’t dead but has been revealed, reborn, and will live forever. God always has the final word, and the final word is love and life.

Call to Worship

Darkness gives way to light;

**Christ is Risen!**

Violence gives way to love;

**Christ is Risen!**

Despair gives way to hope;

**Christ is Risen!**

Death gives way to life;

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

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

O Living One, we confess to the world that Christ is Risen! We confess to the world that death does not have the final word! We confess to the world that hate has no hold on us. We confess to the world that hope is alive and reigns in us! We confess to the world that violence is defeated at the cross, and that life eternal is the commandment of God. We confess that Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen Indeed! Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

May you know the peace of Christ, the hope of Christ, the love of Christ, the assurance of Christ in your life. May you share the Word you have received with love, and declare that love in all you say and do. Amen.

Prayer

On this Resurrection Day, O Christ, we rise up for love. We rise up for hope, for justice, for mercy, for peace. We rise up with the marginalized and oppressed. We rise up with those living on the streets. We rise up with those denied entry and contained in camps along the border. We rise up with those who are hated and rejected for their religion, their language, their culture, their race, their ethnicity. We rise up with those who have experienced violence because of the gender and sexual orientation. We rise up with the rejected, the abused, the outcast. We rise up with the imprisoned and those on death row. On this Resurrection Day, we remember You, O Christ, sentenced to death and crucified for us. We remember You, O Christ, rejected, despised, abused, and killed. We remember You, O Christ, who rose from the dead, and continue to rise up in us. We rise up on this day, for the living Christ, who reigns forever and ever. Amen.