Worship Resources for April 22, 2018—Fourth Sunday of Easter, Earth Day

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-14; John 10:11-18

Narrative Lectionary: Paul and Silas, Acts 16:16-34 (Luke 6:18-19, 22-23)

Suggestions for Earth Day: Genesis 1:26-31; Proverbs 8:23-31

Peter and John were arrested after speaking to the people in the temple, and as they are brought forward for questioning, Peter—full of the Holy Spirit—declares that by the name of Jesus they have performed good deeds and healed others. Peter’s bold declaration of faith in Jesus, who was crucified and raised from the dead, leads to their release from prison.

Psalm 23 is the ancient psalm attributed to David, words of comfort and assurance that many of us know by heart. God is the one who leads us, restores us, calms our soul and brings us through the darkest times. God is the one who is with us in the presence of our enemies. And no matter what happens, we know that God’s goodness and mercy is with us, and we will dwell with God forever.

The greatest love, the writer of 1 John states, is the love we have for one another, a love that makes it so we are willing to lay down our lives for the ones we love, because Christ laid down his life for us. Our love must be not only in words, but in truth and action—in how we live for one another, because that is our true heart. How can we have the world’s goods and let another go in need? God knows our hearts, and God abides in us, and we know this because of the love we have for one another.

The Gospel of John envisions Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired hand runs away when the wolf comes, but the Good Shepherd knows his sheep, and the sheep know his voice. John envisions Jesus as the shepherd who brings all people together to become one, and that Jesus lays down his life for his sheep and has the power to lift it up again.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Paul and Silas. In this section of Acts, the author of Luke-Acts takes over in first person narration. The story shared here is a story of liberation, as Paul and Silas not only rebuke a spirit of divination in a slave-girl, but upend the way her owners were using her for their gain. Paul and Silas were thrown into jail for this, because they dared to challenge the way this girl was being used. However, while in prison they prayed, and an earthquake occurred. All the doors were opened and the chains unfastened. Paul and Silas decided to remain in the prison so the guard would not get in trouble (and therefore spared the guard of taking his own life), and instead, convince the jailer to believe in Jesus, and the jailer’s whole household was baptized. Paul and Silas worked for liberation from abuse for the girl, and liberation from fear for the jailer.

In Luke’s account, in chapter 6 Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Plain. Before he speaks, he begins to heal the people and cast out unclean spirits. When he does speak, in the selection for the Narrative Lectionary, he says blessed are those who are ridiculed, hated, and excluded, for this is exactly what happened to the prophets, and the reward for those who remain true will be great in heaven.

My personal suggestions for Earth Sunday in Genesis 1 and Proverbs 8 have to do with humanity’s role in being created in the image of God to care for the earth. The selection from Proverbs comes from the viewpoint of Wisdom, personified as a woman, a co-creator with God, and God’s Wisdom calls us to care for the world and all that God has made.

Our actions speak louder than our words, so the saying goes, and it seems the Gospel agrees with this. How we live out Christ’s love is much more important and powerful than what we say. We are called to live as Christ lived, to live with God’s love in us, and that love calls us to lay down our lives for others and to meet their needs of those around us. Jesus knows our hearts, and calls us by name. We are called to live by Christ’s example, and to love in a way that we are willing to die to ourselves and live for others.

Call to Worship

God made the heavens, the stars and the sky;

**May all creation praise our God!**

God made the plants and animals, birds and sea creatures;

**May all creation praise our God!**

God made us with purpose: to worship and care for what God made;

**May all creation praise our God!**

God calls the earth and all that is in it to worship and praise;

**May all creation praise our God!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we confess that we have not cared for the world You have given us. We have not loved others as we love ourselves. We have hoarded the world’s resources as if they are our own, rather than Your creation that is temporarily in our care. We have not been willing to lay down our own desires, even our very lives, for the lives of those in need around us. Forgive us for our selfishness and short-sightedness. As the world’s oceans continued to be filled with our waste, may we work to clean the water and to reduce our pollution. As people continue to be hungry, may we work for sustainable methods to produce and distribute food so that all who are hungry may be fed. As the world continues to experience dramatic climate change, may we work for justice to restore the world and help those who are in the greatest need, who live in coastal communities and places where environmental disaster threatens. In the name of our Creator God, God Most High, we pray all things. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Listen to the ways of Wisdom: find delight in the world God created, find your purpose in caring for the earth, and live into God’s intention of stewardship, and God’s hope of restoration. Know that you are forgiven and loved, and restored. Amen.

Prayer

Eternal One, Your love for us burst forth in the creation of the universe, though no one knew it yet. Your love for us blazed alive in the life and death of Jesus, though no one really understood it yet. Your love became known to us in a new way through Christ’s resurrection, though we still struggle to comprehend it. Your love for us is so great that Christ laid down his life for us. May that same love burn in us so bright that we give our lives to You, in the ways we love one another and care for the earth, so that we may truly understand the wisdom of Your love, that endures forever. In the name of Wisdom, in the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.