Worship Resources for April 24th, 2016—Fifth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

Narrative Lectionary: Church at Corinth, Acts 18:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 (Mark 9:34-35)

We begin with Peter’s defense of his actions of eating with Gentiles in Acts 11:1-18 (however, Paul tells a very different account of Peter’s actions in Galatians 2). Peter explains that he has beheld a vision in which God has called all food clean, and convinces the church in Jerusalem that Gentiles are to be accepted as part of the body of Christ. What God has declared clean, we must not call profane, Peter answers. The people recognize that this is the work of the Holy Spirit, and that they cannot hinder the work of God.

Psalm 148 is a magnificent call to worship and song of praise. It begins by calling heaven and the angels into worship. Then the heavenly bodies: sun, moon and stars; the waters above the heavens. The next act calls creation—the earth, creatures on the earth and in the sea and air, and even the weather to praise God. The kings of the earth are called upon, along with all rulers, all people—men, women, everyone! All of creation—all of the universe that is known—is called to praise God.

Revelation 21:1-6 is the vision of the new heaven and new earth, in which death and mourning are no more (Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire at the end of chapter 20—death and hell will exist no more). Now, God’s home is with us. The dividing line between earth and heaven, between life and death is erased forever, for God is the beginning and the end.

Jesus gives the new commandment in John 13:31-35. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus states that the greatest commandment is to love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. In John, there is simply “Love one another.” Just as Jesus has loved us, we are commanded to love one another. We are known as Christ’s disciples if we have love for one another.

The Narrative Lectionary looks at the Church in Corinth in Acts 18:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 1:10-18. In Acts, we learn that Paul meets Aquila and his wife Priscilla, and that they are also tentmakers and help begin the church in Corinth. However, we learn that as the church grows, there is great conflict, and divisions have arisen, with some claiming to follow one or another leader, including himself, or Jesus. Paul asks if Christ has been divided. Paul was sent by Christ to proclaim the Gospel, and Paul is disturbed at the divisions he finds in the church.

Mark 9:34-35 contains Jesus’ teaching that whoever wishes to become first must become last of all and servant of all. The disciples had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. Following these verses, Jesus teaches them that whoever welcomes a little child in his name welcomes him. To be great, one must serve.

The vision of God’s beloved community, the new heaven and earth, the heavenly realm or kin-dom, is this: a place in which death and sorrow have no part. A place in which division and greatness have no part. A place in which God has declared what is good and holy and no worldly distinction of worth is used. Our current society places value on wealth and fame and notoriety; God’s value is in welcome, hospitality, and love for one another.

Call to Worship (from John 13:34-35)

Jesus has given us a new commandment:

 **We are commanded to love one another.**

Just as Christ has loved us,

 **So we ought to have love for one another.**

By this, everyone will know we are Christ’s disciples:

 **By our love for one another.**

Come, may we join our hearts in worship:

 **Worship God by loving one another.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have not loved one another. We confess that often we are jealous and bitter. We desire what others have, and are resentful. We ignore the needs of those around us to pine for the possessions and fame of others. Forgive us for not valuing what we have. Forgive us for not loving our neighbor as You have loved us. Forgive us for our selfishness, our greed, and our jealousy. Turn us back to serving You, and serving our neighbor. In the name of Christ, who loves us beyond life and death, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God knows our faults, our shortcomings. God knows that we stumble and we swear and we get jealous and cranky. God knows that we aren’t perfect. God loves us anyway. So love yourself. Forgive yourself. And try to do the right thing, turn back, and help your neighbor in need. Better yet: love them as Christ has loved you. Forgive them, as Christ has forgiven you. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient of Days, all of creation sings forth Your praise. All of creation knows that You are the One who has breathed life, sparked the fire, kindled the imagination that brings forth life and ideas and dreams. You are the One who continues to create in us, in our world, and in our universe. You are the One who creates life out of death, hope out of despair, peace out of war and hate. You are the One who loves us despite all we have done, and loves us because we are Your children. Guide us in this life, to experience beyond the limitations we have created, and to know You more fully and deeply, day by day. Amen.