Worship Resources for April 26, 2015—Fourth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

Narrative Lectionary: Paul’s Mission, Acts 13:1-3, 14:8-18 (Matthew 10:40-42)

We continue reading about the early believers and the beginning of the church in Acts through the Easter season. In Acts 4, Peter and John are arrested after preaching in the temple and “proclaiming that in Jesus there is resurrection of the dead” (vs. 2). Peter, the one who ever denied he knew Jesus when Jesus stood at his own trial, now is filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaims boldly that the good things they are doing—healing and preaching—are done because of Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and God raised from the dead. Peter is boldly proclaiming Jesus now, without fear.

Psalm 23 is the familiar Shepherd’s psalm, of God leading us to good pastures and still waters, and leading us through the valley of the shadow of death. God prepares a place for us despite our enemies, and in their presence, and our blessings overflow. This favorite psalm of many assures us of God’s presence now and in eternity.

1 John 3:16-24 reminds us that we are called to lay down our lives for one another, and that includes seeing the needs of the people around us. How can we say God’s love is with us when we ignore those in need around us and we have the means to help? The writer also reminds us that we cannot lie to God. God knows our hearts. God knows if we are truly loving our neighbor as ourselves and doing what has been commanded of us. But we are reminded that earlier the writer reminded us that we cannot say we have no sin, but God forgives our sins. God knows our hearts. God knows we need help, and that we need to put our trust in God who will help us to love one another.

John 10:11-18 is Jesus’ declaration that he is the Good Shepherd, the one who lays down his life for his sheep. Paired with Psalm 23, we know this is the shepherd who will protect us and care for us. The hired hand runs away, but the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, he knows his sheep and they know him, and he will bring in other sheep that are not yet part of the fold.

The Narrative Lectionary also follows Acts in this season of Easter, and moves to Paul’s mission at Lystra. Paul (first known as Saul) and Barnabas begin to heal people there, but the people mistake them for the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes. The crowds wanted to offer sacrifices to them along with the priest from the temple of Zeus, but Paul and Barnabas restrained them from doing so and proclaim the living God who made everything as the one God.

Matthew 10:40-42 are Jesus’ words of welcoming—whoever welcomes someone in Jesus’ name welcomes Jesus. Jesus has called us to welcome others in his name and to show hospitality to the stranger, as our ancestors did long ago, so we are called to continue to show hospitality to all.

God knows our hearts. We can lie to others and put on a face, but it doesn’t change who we are inside. Instead, we are called to acknowledge who we are before God who made us, and God offers us forgiveness. We are called to pray for God to change our hearts so that we see our neighbors in need around us and look to meeting their needs. But most of all, we do this because God is the Good Shepherd who looks to our needs. God is the one who protects and cares for us, knowing our hearts and knowing each of us intimately. As God welcomes us, so we must go and welcome one another.

Call to Worship

God is welcoming you to this place.

 **Come, all you who are weary, and find rest here.**

God is calling you by name.

 **Come, all who are lost, for God is searching for you.**

God knows your hearts.

 **Come, all who are heartbroken and hurt, for God loves you.**

God is welcoming you to this place.

 **Let us join our hearts in worship,**

 **For Christ welcomes us all in this time and place. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Gentle Shepherd, we have been beat up and broken by the world at times. We have been rejected and forgotten. We have been pushed down and moved to the margins. Bring us in. Bind up our wounds. Lift us up. May we know Your love and embrace. Forgive us when we have been the ones causing the hurt and pain for others, when we have forgotten and rejected our neighbors, when we have been the ones to marginalize and oppress. May Your love, justice, and peace prevail. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God loves you madly. God will search the ends of the earth, the farthest limits of the sea, and find you. God knows you by name and the hairs of your head are accounted for. God knows your hearts. God knows you are not perfect, but God’s love is perfect. You are forgiven, loved, and restored. Amen.

Prayer

Shepherd and Lamb, You have given Your life for us so that we might have life, and You are the one who protects us and saves us. Keep us from the evil in this world by helping us to take up the call of justice. May we look to restore and heal what has been broken and scattered. May we help one another through the valleys of shadows in our lives. May we know, most of all, that we are not alone, and we are called to help shepherd one another in life. In Your name, Jesus Christ, we pray all things. Amen.