Worship Resources for April 26, 2020—Third Sunday of Easter, Celebration of Earth Day

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

Narrative Lectionary: Peter Heals in Jerusalem, Acts 3:1-10 (Mark 6:53-56)

We continue Peter’s bold proclamation on the day of Pentecost to those who had gathered in Jerusalem in Acts 2:14a, 36-41. Peter declared that God made Jesus both Lord and Messiah, the same one that the crowd had crucified. Peter’s choice of words is meant to strike them in the heart, to make them feel remorse, and it works. They ask what they should do, and Peter calls upon them to repent and be baptized, to be saved from the corrupt society they were in, and they respond by thousands being baptized.

The psalmist praises God for answering their prayer in Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19. God delivered the psalmist from death and evil, and the psalmist devotes themselves to the worship of God. They pledge themselves to following God’s ways, to fulfill their vows, to serve God in the presence of others—to make public their devotion as they praise God.

The writer of 1 Peter invokes the exile, a familiar experience in Jewish history, to frame the situation of Gentile converts to Christianity under the Roman Empire in 1:17-23. The writer also uses the metaphor of being ransomed, purchased by Christ from the world, which would be familiar to all who lived under Roman rule. The writer uses these metaphors to explain how the believers are now free, born anew and belonging to Christ, though they still live in this world as if they live in exile.

Luke’s account of the Gospel is the only one that contains this revealing of Jesus to the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. The two travelers are called disciples, but were not included among the twelve as one of them is named Cleopas. Some scholars believe that the second traveler, whose name and gender are not given, might have been a woman. They traveled to Emmaus from Jerusalem, sad about the day’s events when a stranger approached them and asked what they were talking about. Cleopas was dumbfounded that this stranger didn’t know what happened, and he explained how Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. However, some of the women of their group had come back from the tomb that morning and shared that angels told them Jesus was alive. This stranger they encountered on the road explained the scripture from Moses on through the prophets about the Messiah, that the Messiah was to suffer and then be raised. When they reached the village, the stranger seemed to be moving on, but Cleopas and the other disciple urged the stranger to stay with them. As he broke bread before them, they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They went all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples what they had seen, and learned that Peter had also seen the risen Christ.

The Narrative Lectionary picks up after Pentecost in Acts 3:1-10. Peter and John were on their way to the temple when they encountered a man at the gate disabled from birth. The man was laid out there daily by the gate so he could ask for alms. However, when he asked Peter and John for alms, Peter called upon the man to look at him and John. They had no money, but Peter declared, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” Peter took the man by the hand, raised him up, and immediately the man was able to jump and walk, praising God. Everyone recognized him as the man who used to beg in front of the gate. When we read these passages, we must remember that healing is not the same as curing, and we often look at these passages with a 21st century lens instead of the first century, in which persons who were disabled were cut off in society, unable to work and only able to beg. Peter, through God, has helped free this man from the societal conditions that forced him to beg—and Peter’s first action was to take notice of this man, to see him.

Mark 6:53-56 contains the story of Jesus and the disciples heading to Gennesaret, and healing those who were sick. The people recognized Jesus and brought their sick on mats for him to heal, and anyone who touched the fringe of his cloak were healed.

Where is the Risen Christ being revealed to us, especially in this time of Covid-19? Not among the large crowds and masses, but perhaps in our own homes as we break bread. Perhaps on our lonely walks in our sorrow and sadness. Perhaps in the act of recognizing our shared humanity, seeing each other across the street, or seeing those who are still in need sleeping outside. The Risen Christ is among us, perhaps where we’d least expect to find him.

Call to Worship

**Christ is Risen!**

 **Christ is Risen Indeed!**

**Christ is with us on the journey,**

 **Christ is with us at the table.**

**Christ is with us when we rest,**

 **Christ is with us when we wake.**

**Christ is with us when we grieve,**

 **Christ is with us when we rejoice.**

**Christ is Risen!**

 **Christ is Risen Indeed!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty One, we come to You confessing our weariness, our unease, our struggle in this time. There is so much that is unknown, so much to be afraid of. We worry about illness, about death, about finances and education. We worry about our future because we cannot plan for it, we cannot perceive it. We confess to You that we are waiting for some sort of sign, some sort of assurance, and this is difficult for us. But we also confess that You are the Risen Christ. You are with us on this journey, even when we are not sure where we are going or for how long. You are with us when we collapse with exhaustion and when we rise because we must. You remain faithful, even when we do not. Guide us into a deeper faith—not one where we have the answers, but one in which we have the assurance we are not alone, and that You will see us through. In Your name, Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

In the times we think we are most alone, Christ is with us. When we are most distraught, Christ is beside us. When we are grieving, Christ is silently listening. When we rejoice, Christ is celebrating with us. Know that you are never truly alone. Know that you are always loved. Know that the hairs on your head are accounted for. You are God’s beloved. Live with the assurance of God’s steadfast love, now and always. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of the Earth, You formed us from the stardust of the universe’s creation and breathed into us spirit and life. You gave us a world to care for. As we commemorate Earth Day, we are recognizing our sacred duty to be good stewards of the earth. While the pandemic has forced us to slow down our planet’s demise, may we learn from this time how to better care for the only planet You have given us to live upon. May we be better caretakers of the earth’s creatures and resources, of all the life You have made. Grant us wisdom on how we can live better and love Your creation. Amen.