Worship Resources for April 29, 2018—Fifth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Narrative Lectionary: Paul’s Sermon at Athens, Acts 17:16-31 (John 1:16-18)

Philip encounters an Ethiopian Eunuch on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Eunuchs, according to the Hebrew scriptures, couldn’t fully participate in worship in Jewish life, but this was a eunuch reading a particular passage in Isaiah about the Suffering Servant and wanted to know what it meant. While traditionally the Suffering Servant texts have been interpreted to refer to the people of Israel, Philip interprets this passage to be about Jesus. When Philip tells the Ethiopian Eunuch about being baptized, the Eunuch declares, “What is there to prevent me from being baptized?” Philip preaches a gospel of inclusion, showing that there are no barriers when it comes to knowing Christ. We must be careful in our interpretation, because the passage about suffering, as understood in Jewish context, was also inclusive that all have suffered. This passage is for those early Christians to understand the need to be inclusive in their community, not to compare Jews to Christians.

God is the one who provides for the people in Psalm 22:25-31. All peoples of all nations shall turn to God, and God provides for the poor. All things are under God’s dominion, and all the living and the dead shall bow to God, for God is the God of the living, the dead, and those yet to be born.

The writer of 1 John continues his discourse on love, and that we love one another because God loves us. God’s love casts out all fear, and God’s love abides in us. Because of this, we cannot say we love God and do not love one another—we can’t possibly love God without loving others. God’s love abides in us, and we abide with God and with one another.

John 15 refers to Jesus as the True Vine, and we are the branches who produce fruit. We cannot bear fruit without being connected to the vine, and if we do not abide in God, our branches will not bear fruit. This is our purpose, to abide in Christ and to show God’s love in the fruits we bear to the world.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Paul’s Sermon at Athens. Paul was deeply disturbed by all the idols in the city, but focuses specifically on the statue to an unknown god. Paul preaches that the one God is known through Jesus Christ. In a time when monotheism was considered atheism and barbaric, and polytheism was seen as more enlightened in Greco-Roman society, Paul’s teaching is radical. Most of the early Christians were not educated, but declared their knowledge through the love of God found in Christ Jesus, and that true wisdom comes from this. Paul quotes from Greek philosophers and poets to prove his point: the unknowable is made known through the love of God in Christ Jesus.

John 1:16-18, part of the introduction to John’s gospel account, shows that the fullness of God is made known through Jesus, who is the only one who has seen God. Though the law was made known through Moses, grace and truth was made known through Jesus Christ.

The fullness of all wisdom and knowledge of God is known to us in one word, one truth: love. No philosophy, no pantheon of gods, no amount of idols and no law can fully teach this. Love is known through Jesus Christ, and because of Jesus, we love one another. Because we love one another, we love God, and God abides with us.

Call to Worship (from Romans 8:38-39)

For I am convinced that neither death nor life,

 **Nor angels, nor rulers,**

Nor things present, nor things to come,

**Nor powers, nor height, nor depth,**

Nor anything else in all creation—

 **Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

This is the truth of what we worship:

 **God is love, and God’s love abides in us, and we abide with God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving God, we confess that we have turned away from Your ways of love. We have refused to love our neighbor in the ways You have loved us. We refuse to even acknowledge that we have neighbors in the ways we treat others. We have turned away from kindness, compassion, and mercy, and instead justified ourselves through our selfish actions. Forgive us for mistaking love with our desire. Forgive us for swapping love with self-satisfaction. Forgive us for trading love for ownership and power over. Forgive us for not living into the selfless love of Christ Jesus, who gave his life for us, and in whose name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Beloved, because God loves us, we love one another. Beloved, because God forgives us, we forgive one another. Beloved, because God abides in us and God is love, love abides in us and we abide in God. You are God’s beloved. With you, God is well pleased. Go, believe in the power of God’s love, forgiving others as you have been forgiven, and pursue justice and peace, but most of all, abide in love. Amen.

Prayer

Mystery of Mysteries, help us to seek Your wisdom by living into Your truth, and Your truth is found in the love we have for one another. May our love be fearless. May our love be without judgment. May our love call us into Your ways of justice, Your ways of practicing kindness, and Your ways of building peace. Mystery of Mysteries, we only know You in a glimpse; but we know You most fully in the abiding love we have for one another, a love that comes only from You, who gave Your life for us. Amen.