Worship Resources for April 3rd, 2016—Second Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

Narrative Lectionary: You Shall Be My Witnesses, Acts 1:1-14 (Mark 6:7-13)

We hear the words of the apostles after the Resurrection in this Easter Season, in which Peter and the others are described in the book of Acts as proclaiming the Gospel. Peter and the others are arrested early on and brought before the council. Peter proclaims that they must obey God rather than any human authority, because they are witnesses of God having raised Jesus from the dead.

This selection from Psalm 118 overlaps the reading from Palm Sunday (and from last week’s Narrative Lectionary), in which the psalmist proclaims that in God they shall live. Though they have experienced punishment, God has delivered them. Though they have been rejected, they have become the chief cornerstone. The psalmist continues by asking God to continue to save the people, and blessing the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Psalm 150 is a song of praise calling upon the people to use their instruments and voices, and everything that has breath to praise the Lord, praising God for all of God’s mighty acts throughout history, and throughout creation.

Revelation 1:4-8 contains John’s address to the seven churches in Asia Minor that the letter of Revelation was written to. John proclaims that Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth—a theme in his letter that addresses the tyranny of the empire and those who have become cozy and compliant beneath it. John also states that Jesus has made us a kingdom, that all of us are priests serving God. This is the heavenly kingdom, or reign, or beloved community—in which we bless and serve one another, and serve God. John proclaims that Christ is coming on clouds (using the very image that Jesus gave the disciples, that he would come upon clouds) as a way of stating that Jesus is about to be revealed to everyone, the one who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John 20:19-31 is the familiar story of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples on the evening of his resurrection, into a locked and closed room. Jesus’ first words to the disciples are, “Peace be with you.” But of course, Thomas is not there. Jesus has given the Holy Spirit to the disciples through his breath, and now they breathe in the power of the Holy Spirit. But Thomas refuses to believe until he sees him the second time, with his own eyes, and sees the scars on Jesus’ own body.

The Narrative Lectionary starts with the first chapter of Acts, continuing Luke’s narrative, now writing about the beginnings of the church. Luke addresses the appearances of Jesus to the disciples, the ascension, and those disciples, along with the women and Jesus’ brothers (Luke appears to count them separately) who remained faithful to Jesus. They gather in a house in Jerusalem for prayer together in these first weeks.

Mark 6:7-13 is the commissioning of the disciples to go out two by two and call upon the people to repent, and to pray for those who were sick and to cast out demons. The disciples are not to bring anything with them, but rather rely on the hospitality of those they meet along the way, a way of understanding God’s providing for them through the goodwill of others.

Faith and Doubt. They are not opposites, but rather doubt is a part of the journey with faith. The story of “Doubting Thomas” is one of my favorite stories, because we all can think of something that has happened to us, or to someone else, that is just too unbelievable. Something that others (or we) could not believe. And yet, it happened! Poor Thomas gets picked on, but he is just like us—at times, all of us are skeptics. And at times, we can be like Peter and proclaim the Good News that we have witnessed. It is all part of the journey. And perhaps, like the disciples who didn’t throw out Thomas for his doubt, we need to rely on the goodwill and hospitality of others to make it through those times of doubt into times of assurance.

Call to Worship (from Proverbs 9)

Wisdom has built her house, and has called out to the streets,

 **“You who are simple, turn in here!”**

She has set her table, and to those who lack wisdom she says,

 **“Come, walk in the ways of insight.”**

Wisdom calls out to those of us with doubts and struggles,

 **“Come, join us at the table.”**

Jesus calls us from across the waters of fear and despair,

 **“Come, and follow me.”**

Wherever you are on the journey of faith,

 **Come, follow Jesus, and worship God together.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we confess that at times we are skeptics. At times we doubt that You exist because of the evil we have seen in the world. Oppression, marginalization, and plain hate still plague our world, and it is hard to see Your love and light. Sometimes, even those who bear Your name do not walk in Your ways. Help us to see Your goodness in this world. Help us to know Your love. Fill us with Your love and goodness, so that we might love one another, and lift up one another in faith. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Psalm 27:13-14)

The psalmist says, “I am sure I shall see the goodness of our God in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” Know that you do not wait alone. God has given us one another for this journey of faith, to help one another. Know that you do not wait alone; Christ is with us. Be encouraged, and encourage one another. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Holy One, You continue to create life around us, through the dying and birth of stars, through the cycles of life of creation around us, from the death of trees in which new shoots spring forth from the moss-covered remains. You continue to create new life within us, through the birth of ideas and the sparks of insight, through the revelations of the work of justice and peace. Guide us into ways of cultivating new life around, in the midst of the terrible news, the destruction and death seems to prevail. Bless us to do the work of creating and caring for creation all around and within. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.