Worship Resources for April 5, 2015—Easter Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (or Acts 10:34-43); John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

Narrative Lectionary: Easter, Matthew 28:1-10 (Psalm 118:19-24)

The day has come that we have been waiting for has come, and the tomb has been found empty!

For the season of Easter, the Revised Common Lectionary mainly uses Acts for the first passage instead of the Hebrew Scriptures, but there is a choice from both Acts and Isaiah for this Sunday. In Acts chapter 10, Peter has come to the revelation that God’s love shows no partiality, and the Good News of God is to be given to the whole world. The old ways have come to an end, and God has done something new and Peter is just grasping this Good News that Jesus preached on earth has come to fruition in his resurrection, that the Good News is for all nations.

Isaiah 25:6-9 contains the prophet’s message of hope for the day when God invites everyone to the banquet table, and death’s power is destroyed forever. The veil will be torn away and God will end our mourning by wiping away our tears. This is the God we have waited for. This is the moment we have waited for. This is the invitation we have waited for.

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 sings praise to God whose love endures forever. God is the God of Life, and not only accepts those who are rejected, but has made the rejected ones the foundation, the cornerstone for the kingdom. This is what God does—God brings in the outcasts and the marginalized, and sets them as the most important. The psalmist rejoices in the work God has done and is doing, even though the psalmist does not feel he deserves it.

1 Corinthians 5:1-11 is Paul’s confession about Christ, and his own witness to the works of Christ in his life. Paul’s life has been transformed because of Christ. Paul and all of the others who have witnessed the risen Christ work so that all will come to believe in Jesus Christ.

John 20:1-18 is the last account of Jesus’ resurrection in the Gospels. Mary Magdalene is a prominent figure, the first to witness Jesus’ resurrection, the first to be called to go proclaim the Good News, to the disciples and to others. It is also the only account where Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and she does not recognize him until he says her name. Where the disciples have gone to their homes, Mary has gone nowhere, because she does not want to leave her Lord. When the tomb was found empty, the disciples went away perplexed but Mary wept, for she wanted to care for her Lord’s body. And when Jesus spoke her name, she recognized him and believed.

Mark 16:1-8 is the earliest account of Jesus’ resurrection. In this account, Mary is with two other women, and they go to the tomb after the sun has risen (in John’s account it was still dark). The tomb is found empty, a man dressed in a white robe tells them that Jesus has risen, and that they are to tell the disciples to go on ahead to Galilee where they will see Christ. But the women run away afraid, and the scripture says they said nothing to anyone. The verses after 8 were added later, as noted in most Bibles and by most scholars—so the ending of the first Gospel account is vague. The women run away, afraid. Terror and amazement has seized them.

The Narrative Lectionary uses Matthew’s account, which seems to have the most “special effects.” There is an earthquake, an angel descends and rolls back the stone and sits on it. They not only witness this, but see Jesus on their way to tell the disciples what has happened, and Jesus gives them instructions to tell the disciples he is going to Galilee.

Terror and amazement—we often celebrate this day but forget how it was for those women, for the disciples, for the whole community—nothing like this had happened before. A body did not just disappear from a tomb, a stone was just not rolled away. God did something new, and God continues to do something new. The world is turned upside down, and terror and amazement are appropriate responses. The way of the whole universe is that all living things die, but God has just changed the universe forever. God has changed us forever, through the raising of Christ from the dead.

Call to Worship

Night is over; morning has broken!

**Jesus Christ is Risen!**

The stone that closed off death has been rolled away!

**In Christ we have the promise of resurrection!**

It has been declared to us: Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

**Hallelujah! Hallelujah!**

**Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed!**

Let us worship and celebrate our Risen Lord;

**Let us celebrate the resurrection, and the gift of eternal life with God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we come to You carrying heavy burdens. We see death and destruction in the world and hopelessness weighs on us. We hear of violence on our streets and helplessness holds us back. We feel sorrow and regret in our own lives and despair closes us in. Break open the doors of life. Tear down the walls of death. Help us to know Your resurrection in our daily lives, and the promise of resurrection in our lives now. In the name of the Risen Christ we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Dawn has broken, new life has sprung forth. In Christ we have the forgiveness of sins, the promise of new life now and the hope of resurrection. In Christ is the fullness of life. Come, join in. Come, know that you are loved and forgiven. Come, know that life is full of possibility that has no end. Amen and amen.

Prayer

Creator of all, You have ordained the promise of life from the beginning. Out of nothing You created the world and cultivated all living things. Every spring plants return and new vegetation comes forth. Every year, new life abounds. In our hearts, there is new life now, and in our very cells the promise of eternal life with You. Help us to believe. Help us to share the Good News, because Your love is written on our very DNA. Your love is written into our hearts. You love restores and gives life that is forever. In the name of the Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.