Worship Resources for April 8, 2018—Second Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

Narrative Lectionary: Thomas, John 20:19-31 (Psalm 145:13-21)

The passage from Acts reflects the unity of the early followers of Jesus in the days after his death and resurrection. For the early Christians, private property ownership was done away with, because they saw themselves as citizens of the heavenly kingdom, God’s reign on earth, the Beloved Community of Christ. They were of one mind, one heart, one soul—and they shared what they had in common with one another, so that their very lives were a testimony of the resurrection of Jesus.

Psalm 133 is a song of blessing, probably given at a wedding. The psalmist celebrates when kindred come together and live as one. When clans join together, it is an anointing, as precious as oil, and a blessing before God. In ancient days, property was passed down through marriage, and the way one’s family name survived was through their property and name being passed down. Thus, the joining together of families and clans through marriage is a blessing of life forever.

The writer of 1 John declares that what the community has known and heard and seen—what they have witnessed—is what they are passing on to the reader, so they may have the same joy in Jesus. The writer declares that Jesus is Light, and that those who follow Jesus must also walk in the light. Jesus is the one who forgives sins, and all of us have sinned. There were divisions in the early community of followers about the role of flesh and spirit, and the writer of 1 John wants it to be clear that no one is without sin; yet for those who confess their sins, there is forgiveness in Christ.

The Gospel reading for both the Revised Common Lectionary and the Narrative Lectionary is John 20:19-31. Jesus appears to the disciples in the evening on the day of his resurrection, in a locked room. The disciples were afraid of the authorities, including some of the religious leaders of their day, and Jesus suddenly appeared to them. However, Thomas was not with them. Thomas declares that unless he sees, and puts his hand inside Jesus’ scars, he won’t believe. If you follow Thomas throughout John’s Gospel account, he begins as one of the most devoted—willing to go with Jesus to die if he must in chapter 11, to wondering where Jesus is going in chapter 14, to not believing. But each time Jesus appears to the disciples, he doesn’t scold them, he simply says, “Peace be with you.” With Thomas, after telling him to place his hands in his scars, he only says, “Do not doubt, but believe.” Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

In Psalm 145:13-21, the psalmist declares that God’s kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and that God is the one who provides for our needs and our desires. God is the one who hears our prayers, our inmost desires, and watches over all. God is the one who will protect and deliver. The psalmist declares that they will always praise the name of God, and all people will bless God’s holy name.

In those first few hours, the disciples did not know what to do or what to believe. Mary Magdalene declared she had seen the risen Christ, but the rest were uncertain. However, when they were together, Christ appeared before them. Even for Thomas, though he didn’t gather with the rest that first evening, it was when he was in the company of others that he witnessed Christ before him. God calls us to be in community, and we witness best to the love of Christ when we are with one another. We experience God’s grace and mercy best when we extend grace and mercy to each other. We experience God’s love when we love one another. Christ came to the disciples as they gathered together, and Christ extended the peace of God with them. May we gather together and share God’s love, and witness God’s grace in Christ together.

Call to Worship

Christ has risen from the dead!

 **Do not doubt, but believe!**

Love reigns forever! Life is eternal!

 **Do not doubt, but believe!**

Evil has no power over us. Death does not have the final word.

 **Do not doubt, but believe!**

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.

 **Do not doubt, but believe!**

 **Come, Worship Christ, the Risen Savior!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Savior of the World, we confess that we do harbor doubts. We have experienced great suffering in our world, witnessed the destruction caused by hate; at times we have felt utterly hopeless. We confess that it is not easy to have faith. Savior of the World, renew us in our trust in You. Help us to cling to the truth we know of Your love and grace. Call us to the work of restorative justice and help us to dismantle systems of oppression. Renew our faith in the goodness of one another, and by working together, help us to renew our faith in You, our Savior, Redeemer, and Friend; for it is in Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God Restores. God Heals. God Resurrects. God Renews. God is Love, and Love Never Ends. Go with hope. Go with peace. Go with joy, and know that God’s love endures forever.

Prayer

God of Community, You called us to live together, to share our resources together. You have made us dependent upon one another as a species to survive. You covenanted with Israel in ancient times and You covenant with all the world to be our God. Call us to remember our communal ties and to seek our neighbors in need. Call us to remember our communal responsibility and to work together in caring for the world You gave us. Call us to remember our communal life and help us to live with one another, seeking restoration and justice. God of the Beloved Community, call us to live into the ways of Christ. Amen.