Worship Resources for May 11th—Fourth Sunday of Easter, Mother’s Day

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

We finish up chapter 2 of Acts in this Easter Season with a description of the early church, the first believers after the Resurrection, who gathered together for teaching and fellowship, breaking bread and prayers. This community was radical: they sold their possessions and shared everything they had in common, distributing to those in need. They had the goodwill of the people (vs.47)—their beliefs were seen in their good deeds, and others joined them—“Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (vs. 47). This is what the early believing community was like, and we strive to be of the same hearts and minds to build a loving, generous community in Christ.

Psalm 23 (which was in the Revised Common Lectionary back in Lent as well) is the familiar song of comfort, of God leading us as a shepherd leads a lamb, to cool waters and green pastures, leading us through the valley of the shadow to a place of abundance. One’s enemies no longer follow, but see the table prepared and the cup running over. What follows us instead are goodness and mercy.

1 Peter 2:19-25 speaks of patience while enduring suffering. The early church and Christian leaders faced persecution, and at times martyrdom. They are reminded of Christ’s suffering so they may persevere, but suffering itself is not necessary for salvation. It is Christ that saves us through his suffering, not our own suffering. The end of this passage reminds us that Jesus is the shepherd we return to, though we have wandered away.

John 10:1-10 speaks of the Good Shepherd whose sheep know his voice. Jesus speaks of the shepherd being the Gatekeeper, and all who pass through him have life. The Gatekeeper is not there to keep sheep out, but to lead them in to safety. Others may try to get in over the gate, and they are like thieves, but those who come through the gate are led into eternal life. Jesus later speaks of being The Way, and that those who wish to go to the Father must go through him. The way of Christ is love, forgiveness, mercy, justice, peace—not about getting into heaven, but gaining eternal life that begins now. It is not about being good to get into heaven, as popular belief still dictates: it is about faith in Christ that we gain eternity.

There is a difference between talking about an afterlife and talking about eternity. Eternity begins now. Eternity is new life now. Eternity encompasses all of time. Afterlife is only after we die. Jesus did not speak of an afterlife—Jesus spoke of eternity, of the kingdom of heaven drawing near. We must be careful as Christians to still proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand, rather than speaking only of life after death.

It is also Mother’s Day today. We think of mothers in protective roles, caring for their little ones. I am reminded of Jesus invoking the image of the mother hen guarding her chicks. God is our Mother and Father, the one who protects us, nurtures us and cares for us.

As always, Mother’s Day is a day that ought to be celebrated and arrived at with caution. There will be women in your congregation who cannot have children, who have suffered pregnancy loss or are struggling with fertility issues; people who have recently lost their mothers or have had difficult relationships with their mothers.

For specific Mother’s Day resources, here are links to resources I wrote in [2012](http://rev-o-lution.org/2012/05/06/worship-resources-for-may-13-2012-sixth-sunday-of-easter-mothers-day/) and in [2011](http://rev-o-lution.org/2011/04/30/worship-resources-for-may-8-2011-third-sunday-of-easter-mothers-day/). In addition, I wrote a [Mother’s Day General Program for Disciple’s Women](https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/DW-GP-MothersDay.pdf) that has a full worship service with litanies, prayers and suggestions for scriptures, crafts and other ways of celebrating Mother’s Day while also paying attention to the fact that Mother’s Day can be a difficult day for many.

Call to Worship

Shepherding God, lead us through the valley of the shadow.

 **Lead us into the way of life.**

Shepherding God, guide us away from greed and envy.

 **Lead us into peace and justice.**

Shepherding God, lead us to the table You have set.

 **Lead us to the table of forgiveness and grace.**

Shepherding God, You are the gate.

 **Lead us to You; lead us into eternity. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving God, we come to You confessing the wounds that we carry. We try to hide them from others, denying our own vulnerability and brokenness. We believe we are stronger, more courageous when we do not let others see our wounds. Call us into gentle honesty, careful confession, and the practice of loving-kindness with one another. May we lift up one another in our brokenness, and find healing, restoration and wholeness, in the name of the One who became broken, wounded for us, suffering and dying. May we remember that our Lord is Risen, with scars still in his hands and his side. In the name of Christ, our vulnerable, wounded, and Risen Lord, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Christ is Risen! Christ has come to us bearing scars, and through Christ, we know that we are loved, wounds, scars and all. When we fall, Christ lifts us up, and we find healing, restoration and reconciliation Go and share the good news—no matter what happens, there is something that will happen next. Christ is Risen Indeed! Amen.

Prayer

Mother God, on this day we celebrate and honor our mothers, grandmothers, stepmothers, and others who have been like mothers to us. We mourn with those who are missing their mothers and loved ones. We grieve with those for whom this day is difficult, for those who have lost a child or are unable to have children. We remember that You are our Mother and Father, the Creator of us all, and in Your image we are beautifully made. We are loved. We are Your children. You mourn with us, You laugh with us, You celebrate with us. May we celebrate You today as we share together. Amen.