Worship Resources for May 12th, 2019—Fourth Sunday of Easter, Mother’s Day (U.S.)

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

Narrative Lectionary: Paul’s Mission, Acts 13:1-3, 4:8-18 (Matthew 10:40-42)

During the Easter season, the Revised Common Lectionary focuses on stories from the early church following Jesus’s resurrection and ascension. Dorcas, also known as Tabitha, is given the title “disciple.” She had a ministry to the widows in Joppa, and after she became ill, she died. These widows showed Peter all the clothing she had made for them, and how they grieved losing her. Peter, after asking everyone to leave, called for her to get up, and Tabitha rose from the dead, opening her eyes. Many came to believe in Jesus through the miracle of Dorcas rising.

The Shepherd’s psalm is one known by heart to many, an old song attributed to David of God as our shepherd, who leads us to still waters and restores our soul. The Shepherd God walks with us through the valley of the shadow, and God’s rod and staff bring us comfort. God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, anoints us, and causes our cup to overflow. God’s goodness and mercy will be with us all the days of our life, the psalmist promises, and we will dwell in God’s home forever.

John of Patmos beholds a vision of the heavenly realm, and in Revelation 7:9-17, that vision includes people of every nation, of every tribe and language, who come before the throne and praise God. The angels also surround the throne and the elders and praise God. John is asked by one of the elders a rhetorical question about who the people are, and the answer is they are the ones who have come through the great ordeal. They will hunger and thirst no more, they will struggle no more, they will suffer no more, for God will wipe every tear from their eyes. God is their shepherd, who guides them to the springs of life.

When Jesus attends the Festival of Dedication in Jerusalem, he is asked in John 10:22-30 to declare if he is the Messiah or not, to speak plainly. Jesus declares that his sheep hear his voice. They follow him, and Jesus gives them eternal life. What God (the Father) has given him (the Son), no one can take away, for Jesus and God (Son and Father) are one. The ones questioning Jesus don’t believe him, and Jesus said they will not because they do not belong to his sheep. In order to believe, one must follow.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Paul’s Mission. In Acts 13:1-3, Saul and Barnabas discern God’s call for them, for a special mission. In 14:8-18, Barnabas and Paul heal a man who had been unable to walk due to his feet. When the man is healed and begins to walk, Barnabas and Paul are mistaken for the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes. The priest of Zeus even comes and wants to offer a sacrifice. But Barnabas and Paul tell the people that they are just human like they are. Paul urges the people to turn away from the idols that are worthless to the living God, who made all things. However, it was difficult to convince the people that Barnabas and Paul were not gods as they still wanted to offer sacrifices.

In Matthew 10:40-42, Jesus declares that whoever welcomes him welcomes the one who sent him, and that whoever welcomes a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. Jesus goes on to say that whoever offers a cup of water to a little one in the name of a disciple—they will not lose their reward.

How we welcome one another is how we welcome God. Do we welcome one another with suspicion, or do we welcome one another as we would welcome Christ? Do we accept the gifts from God through others freely, or do we doubt their generosity or motives? For Mothers’ Day, may we remember those who are grieving the loss of their mothers and those who have been like mothers, as Dorcas was to the widows and other disciples. May we remember those who grieve the loss of a child, or who are unable to have children. How we live is a witness to Christ, but also how we welcome and accept one another, and how he we hold that space of celebration and grief.

Call to Worship

As a shepherd calls to their sheep,

**We are listening for the call of God to follow.**

As a shepherd cares for the lambs, looking out for the lost and least,

**We are called to seek out the lost and least in our world.**

As a shepherd rejoices when the lost sheep are found,

**We rejoice and welcome one another in the name of Christ.**

As a shepherd leads the sheep to safety and rest,

**We enter this time of worship, finding safe rest in our God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving God, we come to You with all our emotions, our grief and our joy, our bewilderment and our anger, our sadness, fear, and hopefulness. We are a messy people and sometimes our hearts are a mess. Loving God, we know that You welcome us and accept us as we are. We know that one day our tears will be wiped away and our sorrow turned to joy, but until that day, help us to know that we are okay exactly as we are. We are okay if we grieve or are sad longer than others expect. We are okay if we doubt and question. We are okay in our fears and frustrations. And we are okay in our joy. Help us to grow in You and with each other in mutual understanding and care. Help us to carry one another’s burdens, as You carry us. In the name of Christ, who calls us into loving community, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Revelation 7:17)

“For the lamb of God will be [our] shepherd, and he will guide [us] to the springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes.” In God we will find comfort, refuge, and eternal rest. Until then, in one another, we find the hope and courage that comes from God, to bear one another’s burdens, to offer grace and forgiveness. For the Lamb is our shepherd, and we know his voice, and he will lead us home, into reconciliation and peace. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, You are our Father, our Mother, our Creator. You birthed the world in creation and have called us to be born of Spirit, born from above, to become a new creation. The gifts You have given us to share Your love with the world are still growing, still becoming, still waiting to be birthed. You are the midwife, still coaxing forward the wholeness of who You have intended us to be. Giver of Life, help us to better the lives of others in this world by practicing justice, loving one another, and living selflessly, as You did on earth. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.