Worship Resources for May 13, 2018—Seventh Sunday of Easter, Ascension Sunday, Mother’s Day

Revised Common Lectionary

Seventh Sunday of Easter: Acts 1:15-17; 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

Ascension Sunday: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47 or Psalm 93; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

Narrative Lectionary: The Christ Hymn, Philippians 2:1-13 (Luke 6:43-45)

Suggested scriptures for Mother’s Day: Isaiah 66:13 or Isaiah 42:14-16

Our first selection for the Revised Common Lectionary begins with the disciples looking to fill out their roster after Judas’ betrayal and death. By lots, Matthias is chosen to replace Judas as the twelfth disciple, but he is never mentioned again after this. Soon after the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was experienced and received, the disciples grow beyond the original twelve, with several others called disciples (including Dorcas/Tabitha in Acts 9:36). Because there were twelve sons of Israel, twelve tribes, and originally twelve disciples, it seemed important to preserve that number—at least temporarily—to take the place of Judas.

The first psalm is a song of praise for those who stay rooted in God’s wisdom, in the ordinances and statutes set by God. They are deeply rooted and cannot be swayed, whereas those who do not have roots are blown about, and are doomed, but the righteous will be with God.

The writer of First John nears the conclusion of their letter in the epistle selection, summarizing that those who have the Son have eternal life. The testimony of Christ is in their hearts, that God gave us eternal life, and eternal life is found in Christ.

Jesus’ final discourse in John’s account nears its conclusion with Jesus asking for God to protect the disciples, the ones who belong to him, for they belong to God. Jesus asks for God to sanctify them with the truth, knowing the persecution they will face in the near future. Jesus wants the disciples to know that they belong to God and that they do not belong to the world, but they have been sent into the world just as Jesus was sent into the world. Jesus prays that they may be one, just as he and God are one.

For Ascension Sunday, the book of Acts begins as a continuation of Luke’s Gospel account, with Jesus ascending into heaven. Before Jesus ascends, he again promises the coming of the Holy Spirit. However, the disciples ask when the kingdom will be restored to Israel? Jesus replies this is not for them to know. And once Jesus ascends, the angels ask the disciples why they are still looking up? In other words, their focus ought not to be on lamenting how things have changed, but focused on where they are now and how they will move forward. The focus is not on a worldly kingdom, but on the reign of God that they are participating in on earth now.

Psalm 47 is a song of praise, calling the people to worship God who made all things. God is the king of all nations, of the whole earth, and all the princes, rulers of the earth are under God.

Psalm 93 is a short psalm of praise, praising God who is on the throne, and how all the waters that have the power to flood are still under God. God is more majestic than all God has created.

The writer of Ephesians (most attribute to Paul, but it is uncertain, as is whether Ephesus was the original destination of this letter) writes to encourage the early church, that they may receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Christ has been raised and sits upon the heavenly throne, and all things are under his feet. Christ is the head of the church, and the church is the body of Christ.

The end of Luke also contains a brief story of Jesus’ ascension, but the writer of Luke’s primary goal is for the listeners to understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of all scripture, in his view. That everything that happened had a purpose, and now, they are witnesses of what God has done and are called to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins to the end of the earth.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the great hymn found in the second chapter of Philippians. Whether this originated with Paul or Paul is teaching into the church in Philippi, we do not know. We do know that Paul is in prison, and he is concerned about the false teachers that were infiltrating the early church, placing requirements on the Gentile believers to become Jewish first. Paul, by quoting or composing this hymn, reminds them that Jesus came in humility. It’s not about belonging to a group, but about belonging to Christ, who gave himself up on the cross, so that Christ’s name is the name above all names, and every mouth should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. All must work out their own salvation with fear and trembling—not based on the teachings of some who wish to conform.

In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus declares that no good tree bears bad fruit. We are known by the fruits we produce. It is not about our background, but who we have become in Christ. If we bear good fruit, then we ourselves are good.

Mother’s Day is a difficult day for many people. It began as a movement against war, but has become a “Hallmark holiday.” This can be a wonderful day to celebrate and acknowledge the mothering aspects of God, but we must do so with caution. Not everyone has had a good mother. Not everyone has known their mother well. There are women who struggle with fertility issues, those who struggle in their relationships with their mothers or children. And as a church, the father aspects of God have been lifted up, while mothering aspects have been diminished. If you choose to focus on Mother’s Day, do so with caution. Be aware that there may be circumstances within individuals you do not know of, and may unintentionally cause harm by focusing on Mother’s Day.

My suggestions for scriptures to lift up the mothering aspects of God include Isaiah 66:13, where God comforts the people like a mother comforts her child, or Isaiah 42:14-16, where God is like a woman in labor, about to do something new that will change everything. Again, if you choose to preach on these passages, do so with caution.

Mother’s Day litanies can be found here: <http://rev-o-lution.org/2012/05/06/worship-resources-for-may-13-2012-sixth-sunday-of-easter-mothers-day/>

Call to Worship

For God called Christ into the world,

**And Christ prepared us to be in this world.**

As God and Christ are one,

**May we be one in Christ Jesus.**

Christ is the head, and we are the body;

**We are the hands and feet of Christ in this world.**

Beloved friends, we have been called, we are filled, and we are sent:

**In this time of worship, may we feel the spirit of God,**

**And be prepared to do the work Christ has given us to do.**

Alternative Call to Worship for Mother’s Day (from Isaiah 66:12-14)

As a mother carries her child, and lets the child play on her knees,

**God carries us, and teaches us to stand.**

As a mother comforts her child,

**Our God comforts us.**

We shall behold and rejoice, flourishing like the green grass;

**Because God is with us, and we are with God.**

Come, worship God, who loves us as a good parent;

**Worship God: Mother, Father, Creator of us all.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have put You in a box. We have made our image of You to conform to our images of power, made You into the image of a domineering and disapproving male figure, rather than the creative being, wind-driven Spirit who calls forth life that we find in the first chapter of our Bible. We have hidden away Your mothering love and care in similes and metaphors and only called You Father. Forgive us for our narrow-minded understanding. You are beyond male and female; You are beyond our gender constructs. You are Spirit, and You move in all of us, creating each and every one of us of all genders in Your image. May we reflect Your image in our lives, and in the ways we love and accept one another, knowing that each of us is Your child. In the name of Christ, who showed us a glimpse of the divine that is in all of us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Our Wise God knows that we see only through a mirror dimly, but one day we will see face to face. Our Wise God knows that we know only in part, until that day we know in full the depth of God’s love. Our Wise God forgives us, calls us to open our minds to new understandings, and our hearts to love all of God’s people. Come, know that you are forgiven, and set your minds on what God desires for you, and know the fullness of God’s love now. Amen.

Prayer

Turning God, You made the world to the turn, the planets to revolve around the sun, the galaxy to spin. You call us to turn our hearts and minds back to You and to new understandings. When we are caught gazing at heaven, You call us back to the world we are in. You made us to be Your servants in this world, to serve one another as the body of Christ. Turning God, turn us back to Your desires and not our own. Turn us to Your ways of love, justice, and peace. Amen.