Worship Resources for May 17th, 2015—Seventh Sunday of Easter, Ascension Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 1:1-11 or Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1 or Psalm 47 or Psalm 93; Ephesians 1:15-23 or 1 John 15:9-13; Luke 24:44-53 or John 17:6-19

Narrative Lectionary: Hope of Resurrection, Romans 6:1-14 (Matthew 6:24)

On this Ascension Sunday, we begin with the account of the Ascension in Acts (Luke also tells of the Ascension in the passage in Luke 24). It appears that the disciples still do not get it. They are still expecting Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom of Israel in Jerusalem, and they are still watching him as he ascends into heaven, and the angels have to remind them that they will see Jesus return the same way they saw him go. Luke sets up the narrative in Acts that the disciples will continue to have their minds opened to who Jesus really is, and that the kingdom of God is beyond what they understood, or even hoped for and imagined.

The second passage from Acts contains the choosing of a new disciple to replace Judas. But we never hear about Matthias again after this passage. Luke was concerned about keeping twelve disciples as a representation of the twelve tribes of Israel, but for us, in reality we are the twelfth disciple, the ones that must go forward and share the Good News.

Psalm 1 sings praises to God for those who are firmly rooted in God’s words and teachings. Those who are not rooted are like chaff blown about by the wind. Those that are rooted in God will flourish, blossom, and bear fruit.

Psalm 47 is a call for the congregation to sing praises to God who is the true king of the peoples, of the whole earth. In the beginning of the psalm, the psalmist sings of God having helped Israel defeat other nations, its enemies, but at the end, the “princes of the peoples” are gathered as children of Abraham. God is the God of all peoples, of all nations, but Israel has chosen to acknowledge God as their king.

Psalm 93 is also a song about God as the king, but more importantly, God as the creator, and the waters of creation respond to God’s voice (see Genesis 1). Floods, thundering mighty waters, waves of the sea—all responding to God’s voice, to God’s decrees upon the people.

The writer of Ephesians in 1:15-23 gives thanks and praise for the faith of the people receiving this letter, and prays for them, that they would know the hope found in Jesus Christ, who has been raised and has ascended to be with God in heaven, and all things are under him.

1 John 5:9-13 completes the series of readings from 1 John this Easter season. The testimony of God is eternal life in Christ, and that testimony lives in our hearts. Our best testimony to the world is our faith in God’s gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. This eternal life is not a life that begins after death, but begins now: “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (vs. 12).

John 17:6-19 is Christ’s prayer for his disciples, before his death—that God would protect them from evil in the time to come because Jesus will no longer be with them. Jesus prays that they would have the strength to stay in God’s word, to stay the course. Jesus is preparing for them to be sent into the world after his death and resurrection, and knows that his “joy will be complete” in their witness to his love.

Luke 24:44-53 is another version of the Ascension by Luke. In this version, the promise of the Holy Spirit is hinted at, but more importantly, Jesus tells the disciples that they are witnesses of his death and resurrection, and now all nations will come to know him as the Messiah because of their witness.

The Narrative Lectionary follows Paul’s letter to the Romans, declaring that those who know Christ have also died and risen with him. The new life in Christ begins right now. We are dead to sin and alive in Christ’s love and forgiveness. Baptism is symbolic of our death to sin and rising out of the waters, we rise with Christ. God has brought us out of death into life, out of sin into grace.

Matthew 6:24 reminds us that we cannot serve two masters. Jesus was speaking clearly to wealth, and the power worldly wealth has over us. If we are to be a new creation in Christ, wealth and the temptation of abundance of possessions no longer has hold of us, because we are concerned for our neighbors and their well-being above our own desires.

As we near the end of this Easter season, we are preparing not only for Pentecost but the season after Pentecost in the liturgical calendar—symbolic of our preparation to go into the world as the disciples did and proclaim the Good News in word and deed. Because as the disciples watched Jesus ascend, as they heard his final words and the silence afterwards, I have to wonder if they said to themselves, “now what?” And as the church, have we been saying “now what?” for almost two thousand years? Or are we living out the Gospel in the world?

Call to Worship

We are witnesses to the work Christ has done on earth.

**Christ has come! Christ is Risen! Christ will come again!**

We are participating in the work Christ has given us as one body.

**Christ has come! Christ is Risen! Christ will come again!**

We are preparing for life eternal, knowing that new life begins now.

**Christ has come! Christ is Risen! Christ will come again!**

We are joining our hearts to worship Christ our Lord,

**We praise God together, and we participate in the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Come, let us worship and follow our Savior, Jesus Christ!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Life, we come to You knowing that we have not witnessed to the fullness of life in You. We have instead witnessed to the false joys of having possessions, of obtaining wealth, of the false satisfaction of worldly success. What fills us temporarily will leave us empty and drained. Forgive us for taking shortcuts to true joy and for not setting our sights on You and filling ourselves with Your love and compassion for the world. In the name of Christ, who emptied himself and gave himself up for us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God sets our feet upon the rock and secures our paths. God leads us back when we fall astray. God fills us when the world drains us. We are renewed and restored, forgiven and loved by God. Love others, knowing God’s love is filling you. Forgive others, knowing that God has forgiven you. Amen.

Prayer

Loving Jesus, You gave Your life for us so that we might know death and sin have no hold on us, that God’s love and forgiveness triumphs over all, that eternal life reigns in our hearts. We are witnesses of Your life, death, and resurrection in the ways we live our lives, by loving our neighbors and proclaiming Your justice and peace to the world. May we witness to You in all we say and do, knowing that our world still needs the Good News of love and forgiveness, of justice and mercy. In the face of injustice, evil, and death, we proclaim Your justice, Your love, and Your eternal life. In You, we have the promise of new life now, and the hope of resurrection. Amen.