Worship Resources for May 17th, 2020—Sixth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

Narrative Lectionary: Faith, Hope, and Love, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Mark 12:28-31)

Paul addressed the people of Athens at the Areopagus in Acts 17:22-31. He told the Athenians that as he visited their city, he noticed how religious they were, how they worshipped many gods. However, he was taken aback when he saw a statue to an unknown god. They knew something great had happened there, but not which god was responsible. Paul proclaimed that what they worshiped as unknown is the one God, the creator of heaven and earth who does not exist in shrines made by humans. Paul continued to use their own knowledge and wisdom to proclaim God, including their own poetry, that shows that they are also children of God. Therefore, if they are children of God, God cannot be something they create, but must be the Creator. Paul concluded by speaking of a day of judgment, calling upon all people to repent, for the one God raised from the dead is also the one God has appointed to judge.

The psalmist speaks of the trials and ordeals they have gone through, yet remained faithful to God in Psalm 66:8-20. God has kept the people alive, bringing them through fire and water, and into safety. The psalmist turns to worship in response to what God has done for them, making offerings and fulfilling their vows. The psalmist praises God, who heard their prayers and whose love remains steadfast.

The Epistle reading continues in 1 Peter with the theme of doing good in 3:13-22. Believers may suffer for doing what is right, but it is important that they keep their conscience clear and continue to live into God’s ways, even as they make their defense of their faith. Christ is the example, who suffered and went before us. The writer of 1 Peter links baptism to the story of Noah, a symbol of being saved when going through the waters, and that the action of going into the water of baptism is an act of goodness, of knowing God and turning to God’s ways.

The Gospel lesson continues in John 14 with vs. 15-21, that those who love Christ will keep his commandments, and that the Advocate will come. The Greek word is “paraclete” which can also mean helper or comforter. Jesus promised the disciples he would not leave them alone, that they wouldn’t be able to see him, but they would know the love of God because they knew his love.

The Narrative Lectionary turns to the most popular passage in 1 Corinthians, the Love Chapter of 13:1-13. This is the crux of Paul’s argument to a church arguing over who is the greatest, who to follow, and what spiritual gifts are greater than others. Love is the greatest gift of all, for if one has everything but does not have love, they have nothing. Paul might have been quoting another source in this passage, possibly a hymn. He calls upon the church to grow into their faith, to remember that they do not know it all, but one day they will know God fully, and the way to God is love.

Jesus responded to the question of which was the greatest commandment with two in Mark 12:28-31. He first responded with the Shema, the call to prayer that all of the Jewish people knew by heart, and then quoted from Leviticus 19:18 about loving one’s neighbor as one’s self. There are no other commandments greater than these.

As we prepare for the season of Pentecost approaching, the season of the work of the Holy Spirit, perhaps God is calling us to be open to new movements of the Spirit in this covid-19 season. For years, voices from the margins have foretold that the church had to change. Now, everyone recognizes that the church has had to adapt. However, as we recognize the need for prolonged social distancing, studies on the effects of singing and spreading aerosols, we are faced with the reality that the church needs to shift completely. This is not a temporary adaptation, but perhaps a longer-term change in how we gather, and who God needs us to be. But we are not left orphaned. The Advocate, the Comforter, the Helper, is at work and moving among us. Faith, Hope, and Love, abide, these three—and the greatest of these is love.

Call to Worship (from Acts 17:24-25, 28)

**God who made the world and everything in it,**

**God is Lord of heaven and earth.**

**God does not live in shrines made of human hands,**

**God gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.**

**In God, we live and move and have our being,**

**And we are God’s children.**

**Come, worship God,**

**who has been made known to us**

**In Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess to You that we have made idols of money, of careers, of celebrities that we admire, of worldly measures of success. We have sought greatness, notoriety, and self-satisfaction. We have followed the ways of this world instead of the ways of Christ, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to become last of all and servant of all. Forgive us. Call us into accountability, to strip away what this world has held us to, and instead to full embrace Your reign and to live into Your way, Your truth, and Your life. In the name of Christ, who leads us from fear into hope, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

You are not alone. When the ways of this world press down on you, Christ takes upon your yoke. When the fears in this world entrap you, faith opens the door. When despair sucks the air out of the room, the Spirit blows in. You are not forgotten. You are loved, and Your strength is renewed by the faith and love of others. You can do this. You will make it. You are not alone, for we are all with you, and Christ is with you. Amen.

Prayer

God of Steadfast Love, fear is moving fast in our world. The fear of power and control, the fear of disease, the fear of losing jobs and healthcare and education. Most of all, the fear of losing all that we had, the way of life we once took for granted, has shaken us to our core. Fear has wrapped its tendrils around us, but Your love helps us to shake free. Your steadfast love helps us to move forward boldly in faith, knowing that You overcame the worst of our fears at the cross. Nothing can ever be the same, but with You, we know that we can embrace the new life ahead. May Your steadfast love be made known to us, now and always, but especially during our times of trial. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.