Worship Resources for May 18th, 2014—Fifth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

We begin with the account of the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. This story mirrors the crucifixion of Jesus, as when Stephen dies, he asks for Jesus to receive his spirit (vs. 59) as Jesus asks for God to commend his spirit (Luke 23:46), which is a quotation of Psalm 31:5. Stephen also asks for forgiveness towards the ones who have caused his death (vs. 60) as did Jesus (Luke 23:34). But in Stephen’s death, he also has a vision of Jesus in heaven and witnesses to those who are even killing him along with those who saw what happened. In his life and in his death, Stephen proclaimed that Jesus is Lord.

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 pleas for God to deliver them, for God to provide refuge and safety, and the singer puts his trust in God’s hands by commending their spirit to God (vs. 5). The psalmist sings for God to save them in God’s steadfast love, for the singer has put all their trust and hope in God.

1 Peter 2:2-10 references Jesus, who quotes Psalm 118:22 about being the rejected stone that becomes the cornerstone (Mark 12:10). The writer of 1 Peter is speaking to a persecuted, rejected group of followers of Jesus, and the writer is encouraging them to remember that they are beloved by God. They are now God’s people and cannot be rejected by God. The writer reminds them to grow in their faithfulness to Christ, to allow themselves to become spiritual dwellings for God.

John 14:1-14 is part of Jesus’ final discourse. Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them, that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. But the disciples are confused. Thomas wants to be shown the Way, and Philip wants to be shown the Father. They do not get that Jesus is the way, Jesus is in the Father, that Jesus is all in all and he is right there with them. What Jesus does for us is what we should do for all—lay down our lives for one another as Christ lays down his life for us.

Our lives witness to Christ’s love and faithfulness. Stephen witnessed God’s love even in his death. The writer of 1 Peter reminds us that our lives have to be built upon Christ to witness to Christ, to be a spiritual home for God. And Jesus reminds us that our lives must be modeled on his—for he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—we know God’s love when we love one another, when we lay down our lives for one another, the way Christ laid down his life for us.

Call to Worship (from John 14)

Do not let your hearts be troubled

 **Trust in God; Trust in Jesus.**

Christ has gone to prepare a place for us.

 **Christ will lead us to be with Him.**

We know the way to the place where Jesus is.

 **Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**

Come, let us join together on the journey of faith.

 **Come, let us follow Jesus, who is the Way. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we come to You confessing that we have looked the other way, ignored our neighbor in need, and have given in to selfish gain. We confess we have put our own lives above the lives of others, basing our needs on our desires instead of seeing the needs of the world around us. Forgive us. Call us to live as You lived, to lay down our lives for one another, to seek forgiveness from one another and to reach out to one another in mutual love and concern. In the name of Jesus, who continues to show us the Way, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And we can never lose The Way. We can always turn back and find forgiveness, healing, and restoration, because Jesus laid down his life for us. May we know the truth of God’s love, and love one another. Amen.

Prayer

Architect of the Universe, You have called us to be Your home, with Your covenant on our hearts. You live in us. You have built us up to support one another, to lean on one another in our difficult times and to hold one another close to be strong together. Help us to strengthen one another, support one another and lean into each other when we are feeling weak and vulnerable. This is who You created us to be, and this is Your intention for us, to bear one another’s burdens and share in one another’s joys and sorrows. May we live into our created intention more deeply because of Your love for us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.