Worship Resources for May 19th, 2019—Fifth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

Narrative Lectionary: Gospel as Salvation, Romans 1:1-17 (Matthew 9:10-13)

During the Easter season, we begin with stories of the disciples in the early days of the church following Jesus’ resurrection. In Acts 11:1-18, Peter explains to the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem why he now eats with Gentiles. He shares the vision he beheld as well as his meeting with Cornelius, and how the Holy Spirit told Peter not to make a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Peter witnessed the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles, the same gift given to the disciples of Jesus. The leaders in Jerusalem understand and see that God is calling Gentile believers the same as the Jewish followers of Jesus, to the repentance that leads to life.

Psalm 148 is a song of praise, calling all of creation into the worship of God. Beginning with the heavenly creatures, then to the stars, sun and moon, to the firmament above, the psalmist then calls upon the earth, the sea creatures of the deep, all forms of weather, all creatures of the earth and all kings. The psalmist uses the understanding of creation from Genesis 1 to show how everything was made by God to praise God. God has made the people of Israel to be close to God and witnesses of God’s work throughout the whole earth.

John of Patmos beholds a vision of a new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21:1-6. In this new city of Jerusalem, there will be no more mourning, no more tears, no more death. God’s home has now come upon the earth, and human beings and God will live together. God has made all things new, for God is the beginning and the end.

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus gives the disciples a new commandment. Entering into his final discourse to his disciples, Jesus calls them “little children.” Jesus knows that he is leaving them, and they cannot follow him, for they must remain and love one another. This is the new commandment, just as Jesus has loved them, they must love one another. They will be known as Jesus’ disciples if they have love for one another.

The Narrative Lectionary turns to Paul’s letter to the Romans. In his introduction to the church in Rome, Paul begins by sharing who he is: an apostle called to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. He outright states that the Son was descended from David (acknowledging the Jewish roots of the faith) and that he was declared to be the Son of God through his resurrection, and now they have received grace and are sharing the faith among the Gentiles. Paul makes it clear from the beginning that the Gospel is for everyone. He continues in his introduction, praising the church in Rome for their faith that is known throughout the Roman world, and hoping that they might meet so they can mutually encourage each other. Paul comes to the point of his letter in vs. 16-17, that through Christ, God has brought salvation for both Jew and Gentile, for all people, by faith.

Jesus, in Matthew 9:10-13, declares that he has come not to save the righteous but sinners. He eats with sinners and tax collectors, and some of the religious leaders asked the disciples why Jesus did that. Jesus declared that those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick do. Jesus then quotes the prophet Hosea that God desires mercy.

Through Christ, we know that God’s love is for all people. God’s desire for us is expressed through the new commandment, to love one another. We are called not to just love the people who are with us, to love those who look or act like us, or even to simply love the people who might want to join us—but *all* people. The divisions in Jesus and Paul’s day were between Jew and Gentile, but in thinking of the divisions today: citizen and immigrant, documented or undocumented, cisgender or transgender or nonbinary—there are many places where dividing lines can be drawn. And it’s much easier to say, “we love everyone, as long as they become like us,” which was exactly what was happening among the early Christians. Instead, when we look to Jesus, we are called to a new way of faith—accepting and loving everyone on the same terms. All of us are called to repentance, which means to turn back to God. Unfortunately, far too long we have defined that as “conform to our ways.” Our ways are not necessarily God’s ways. Instead, we must love one another. Love has no conditions or qualifiers. Love is simply love.

Call to Worship (from John 13:34-35)

Christ has given us a new commandment,

 **We are called to love one another.**

By this, everyone will know we are followers of Jesus;

 **We are called to love one another.**

This is who we are, this is how we are known:

 **We are called to love one another.**

Come, join your hearts in this time of worship:

 **Love God, following Jesus, and loving one another.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God Who Is Love, we confess that we have misused this precious word. We’ve used it insincerely. We’ve used it as a weapon to abuse others. We’ve shared it, and then broken the foundation of trust that love is built upon. Forgive us, Loving One, and call us into repentance. Help us to remember that we have entered into a covenant with You, and You have commanded us to love one another. May our love grow to be genuine, to be merciful and forgiving. May our love call us to seek justice for our neighbors. May the love You have given us help us to grow into the people You have called us to be. In the name of Christ, who is Love, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Just as Christ has loved us, so we are called to love one another. The love from Christ can never be taken away. We are God’s beloved. May God’s love refresh, renew, and restore you. May God’s love call you into repentance. May God’s love call you into the work of justice for all. And may God’s love fill you with the peace that surpasses all understanding. Amen.

Prayer

God of Restoration, tear down the walls we have built up. Level the rough places. Raise up the chasms that we have dug. Repair the bridges we have torn down. Call us into the work of restoring the earth that we have decimated. Call us into the work of healing, between one another, with the earth, and with You. God of Restoration, give us the tools we need. Guide us in how we use our gifts for the work of reconciliation. In the name of Christ, who is the bridge, the way to eternal life through love, we pray. Amen.