Worship Resources for May 24th, 2020—Seventh Sunday of Easter, Ascension Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary:

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

Seventh Sunday of Easter: Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

Narrative Lectionary: Death Swallowed Up In Life, 1 Corinthians 15:1-26, 51-57 (Mark 12:26-27a)

The readings for Ascension Sunday begin with the account of the Ascension in the first eleven verses of Acts. The same author of Luke begins with a similar opening, a letter to God-Lover. Jesus has “presented himself alive,” evidence for the new believers that he has risen from the dead, and has told the disciples to remain where they are in Jerusalem for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. The disciples wonder if this is the time Jesus will restore the kingdom to Israel, but Jesus tells them it is not for them to know. The disciples are still focused on a worldly kingdom. Jesus ascends, and a cloud takes him out of sight. While they are watching, two angels stand by them and ask them “why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” Jesus will come to them again as he went into heaven—in an unexpected way.

Psalm 47 is a song of praise to God, the true king. God rules over all the nations of the world. God has brought the nations under the feet of Israel, but God is the one who reigns over all princes, all nations; all people are children of Abraham.

Psalm 93 also sings of God as the king who reigns over all. God is Ancient, from the beginning of time, and the floods of creation’s waters continue to praise God and lift up the throne. However, more majestic than all of creation is God.

In this part of the introduction of the letter of Ephesians 1:15-23 the writer gives thanks for the faith of the church in Ephesus and for their love of one another. The writer prays for a spirit of revelation and wisdom for the readers, so they will be open to God’s power, which raised Christ from the dead and gave Christ authority over everything. Christ is the name above every name and the head of the church, which is the body of Christ.

The author of Luke gives a slightly different account of the Ascension in Luke 24:44-53. Jesus’ final words to the disciples state they are witnesses of his death and resurrection, the fulfilment of scripture. Jesus tells them to stay in Jerusalem until the power from on high comes down on them, and he is carried up into heaven. The disciples worship Jesus, and return to Jerusalem with great joy.

The readings for the Seventh Sunday of Easter also begin with Acts 1, overlapping slightly with verses 6-14. Following the ascension of Jesus, the disciples return to Jerusalem, gathering in the same upper room where Jesus held his last supper, and Jesus’ mother Mary and other women also meet them and devote themselves in prayer together.

Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 is a song of praise to God who protects the vulnerable, the orphans and widows, and is with the righteous. God led the people through the wilderness and spoke to them at Sinai. God provides for those who need, raining in abundance. The psalmist calls upon the kingdoms of the earth to sing to God, whose power is in the skies, who is the ancient rider of the heavens. The psalmist concludes by praising God who gives power and strength to the people.

The Epistle lesson concludes the readings during the Easter season of 1 Peter with 4:12-14 and 5:6-11. The author of 1 Peter was concerned about finding meaning in suffering—in that God doesn’t cause it, but that when we suffer for the faith, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit rests on us. Be humble, and God will exalt you. The writer warns against the devil, that the temptation is to think one suffers alone, but all believers are in this together with similar suffering. However, Christ will restore, support, and strengthen those who endure.

In Jesus’ final prayer to God in John 17:1-11, he calls upon God to glorify him, so that he might glorify God with his suffering and death and resurrection. Jesus prays for the disciples, who have believed in him and believed that God sent him. Jesus declares that they belong to God, and asks for God’s protection as he is no longer in the world with them. Jesus’ final desire is that they may be one, as he is one with God.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the defeat of death, swallowed up in life in 1 Corinthians 15:1-26, 51-57. Paul begins his argument for belief in resurrection with his understanding of scripture in that Christ died for our sins, that Christ appeared to the disciples and others, and that Paul himself had an encounter with the risen Christ. Paul then heads into his argument against the Corinthians who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead—if they don’t believe this, they deny that Christ rose. Paul uses the metaphor of Adam as the first human being, in which we all share in death, and Christ as the firstborn of the resurrection, in which we all share in eternal life. Christ rules over everything, even death. Paul declares that we will all receive the resurrection, our bodies transformed, mortality conquered by immortality and death swallowed up in victory.

Mark 12:26-27a, Jesus speaks of the resurrection to some Sadducees who had questioned him. Jesus reminds them that God speaks in Scripture to Moses and says that they are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the patriarchs long gone—so that God is the God of the living, not of the dead.

In a sense, Ascension Sunday and/or the Seventh Sunday of Easter mirror Reign of Christ Sunday. As Reign of Christ Sunday prepares for the new year, for Advent and Christmas, seasons of the Incarnation, Ascension prepares us for Pentecost, season of the Holy Spirit. This is Christ triumphant over death and sin. This is Christ who not only rose from the dead but now is seated with God in the heavenly realm. This is Christ who conquered death. This is Christ who has promised something more to us—the Holy Spirit—and who will be with us forever. This is Christ who reigns over all, and will see us through.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 47:1-2, 6-7)

**Clap your hands, all you peoples!**

**Shout to God with loud songs of joy!**

**For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome,**

**God reigns over the whole earth.**

**Sing praises to God, sing praises,**

**For God reigns over the whole earth!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we let our fears get the better of us. At times we feel frozen, stuck right where we are, not only physically, but mentally and spiritually. We end up focused on the wrong things, looking back instead of looking forward. Remind us that we are not alone. Remind us that You are always present with us. Remind us that Your perfect love casts out fear. Restore us, O God, so we may know Your steadfast love endures forever. Amen and Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God is on the move. God is in our hearts. God is by our side. God is with us. Know that God’s love enfolds you, and covers you, and is with you always. You are God’s beloved child. You are forgiven and restored. Share the good news. Share God’s love and forgiveness. Amen.

Prayer (from Psalm 68)

Rider of the Ancient Heavens, we still find ourselves looking up, though we know You are with us, by our side, amongst us now. We look to the old stories that our ancestors trusted, and we find new meaning for our lives. May we remember our roots. Though we know the earth is round, may we still sometimes look up in awe and wonder at the works of Your creation. May we still seek the skies as our ancestors sought other gods, and then learned about You, knowing that You are more awesome, more amazing. May we still tremble when we consider all You have made, all You have done, and all You are continuing to do in our lives. For as the ancient psalmist declared, You ride across the skies, You provide for the needy, You marched before our ancestors in the wilderness. You are the father of orphans, protectors of widows, and provider for those imprisoned. You are our God, ancient and holy, and new as the day. We hold You in awe and wonder. Amen.