Worship Resources for May 28, 2017—Seventh Sunday of Easter, Ascension Sunday

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

Revised Common Lectionary for 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: One in Christ, Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29 (Luke 1:68-79)

The writer of Luke begins Acts much the same way, writing to the same Theophilus, and speaking about Jesus’ resurrection and time with the disciples for forty days. Then, Jesus promises the disciples the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the disciples wonder if this is the time when the kingdom will be restored to Israel. They are still thinking of a worldly king, and when Jesus ascends, they watch him leave them. But it is the angels who say, “why do you stand looking toward heaven?” Basically, roll up your sleeves, the work continues, for the kingdom of heaven will be brought to earth.

Psalm 47 sings praise to God, who is the king of the whole earth. All of the princes of the peoples gather before God, for God is not only the God of Israel, but the God of the earth, who has brought all nations under God.

Psalm 93 also declares that God is the king of the earth, and the waters obey God, lifting up their voice to praise God. God is the one who has made and established the earth, and brings holiness to the world.

The writer of Ephesians shares their prayer in 1:15-23 for the church that has been faithful, and prays as the people come to know Christ that they will experience the power of God that is at work in Jesus Christ. Christ was raised from the dead, and is seated above all other authority and power, which is now under his feet. The church is the fullness of Christ’s body, and Christ is the head—an image used by Paul and continued by the early writers in the church.

Luke 24:44-53 is another account of the Ascension, also from Luke’s point of view, in which the minds of the disciples are opened to understand the scriptures, and Jesus promises that they will be clothed with power from on high. They are called to remain in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the disciples go forth to the temple praising God.

For the Seventh Sunday of Easter, the passage from Acts 1 overlaps with the passage for Ascension Sunday. This selection begins with the disciples asking Jesus if now is the time when the kingdom will be restored to Israel. They are asking the wrong question, because Jesus didn’t come to re-establish an earthly kingdom, but to declare the kingdom of God was at hand. And after Jesus’ ascension, the angels remind the disciples to keep their eyes focused in front of them, not on the clouds. The passage continues with their return to Jerusalem and gathering with the faithful—the disciples as well as the women (who also ought to be called disciples), and Jesus’ brothers.

Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 sings praise to God who is the defender of orphans, the protector of widows, the one who leads the prisoners to freedom, and the God who defeats the enemies of the people. In this passage, God is a warrior God, who marches in front of the people. God is the one who brings rain to the desert and brings power to the people.

In these selections from 1 Peter, the writer reminds the people to not lose heart, to remain steadfast in their faith. When they suffer, they are to rejoice, remembering that they share in the same suffering of Christ. The writer tells the reader to “cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you” (vs. 7). This is a powerful statement, but one in which we must be careful not to “pray away” mental illness, as if prayer and faith are cures for depression and anxiety. Rather, it is a reminder to all of us that when we struggle, Christ has also struggled. Not that it makes it better for us; however, it reminds us we are not alone, and in that knowledge we have hope.

Jesus prays for the disciples in John 17:1-11, praying that the work in him is glorified and that the people will come to know eternal life in God through Jesus. Jesus prays for the disciples who have come to know God through Jesus, and declares that they belong to God because they belonged to Jesus, and now that he is going to God, that the disciples who are still in the world would be protected and blessed by God, that they may be one as God and Christ are one.

The Narrative Lectionary continues with the Letter to the Galatians and Paul’s declaration that the boundaries made in this world between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female—all boundaries that separate and keep out have been erased because we have been made one in Christ Jesus. Paul is rather blunt to the church in Galatia that they have gone astray by placing burdens on the Greek Christians there, and that in Christ we have been set free from all burdens and boundaries. We are one in Christ.

Luke 1:68-79 is the song of Zechariah, proclaiming that the Messiah is the fulfillment of the promise made to their ancestor Abraham. This Messiah will bring light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and will guide their feet into the way of peace.

The Ascension marks the end and the beginning; the end of the way of thinking that a worldly kingdom would be established, and instead, the heavenly kingdom of God is at hand. We are the body of Christ, the hands and feet of Christ in this world. We are called to serve, and to be one in Christ, and to not allow the boundaries and borders that we have constructed in this world to separate us from one another, to keep out part of the body of Christ, for we need one another.

Call to Worship:

We are called to be the body of Christ,

 **We are the ones called to serve as Christ in this world.**

We are called to share in the gifts of the Spirit,

 **We are the ones who teach, care, and love as Christ loves us.**

We are called to bring the Good News,

 **We are the ones who proclaim Christ’s death and resurrection until Christ comes again.**

Come, worship God,

 **Who dwells in us as the body of Christ in this world. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have our eyes set in the clouds instead of on the earth You have given us. We desire heavenly treasure but we keep believing that worldly means will help us attain it. Forgive us for our short sightedness. Draw us away from the temptations to seek worldly power and measures of success, and call us to the down-to-earth message of Your love, to care for the needs of those around us, especially the oppressed and marginalized. You have called us through scripture to care for the widows and orphans among us; help us to see all those who are left out by society and are in need. Help us to break down the dividing walls that we have placed, so that we may truly be one, as You and Christ are one. For it is in Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

We were made by God, brought forth from the earth, the earth that was called good when God created it. Your very being is good. You are blessed, earth-born, and called forth to care for the earth and all who dwell in it. Go, know that you are forgiven and loved by the God who made the earth, and made you, and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Spirit of Life, breathe new life into us. We are weary from the events of the world; we are drawing inside and becoming numb because of all the betrayal and devastation we experience around us. Breathe new life into us, so that our own spirits may rise again. Breathe new life into us, so that we may be renewed and restored. Breathe new life into us, so that we may once again hear Your call to go as healers into a broken world. Breathe new life into us, so that we may encourage one another. In the name of Christ, who taught us how to breathe in this world, we pray. Amen.