Worship Resources for May 5—Sixth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; John 5:1-9 or John 14:23-29; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

Acts 16:9-15 contains the story of Lydia, one of the “God-fearers,” or Greeks who had come to believe in the One God and were influenced by Jewish teachings, but were gathering separately. The writer says they came upon a place in the river which they “supposed there was a place of prayer.” Perhaps influenced by the teachings of John the Baptist, these Gentiles were gathering to pray and worship together and the author writes that he and Paul came upon this particular group of women. Lydia is among these women, and as a dealer in purple cloth—the color of royalty—Lydia is a woman of wealth and power. She is transformed by the message of Jesus through Paul, and has her whole household baptized. Lydia is an outsider; she is not a man, she is not a widow (like Dorcas who we read about last week, as the widows had special status in the early church), nor is she Jewish—but she is influential within her own community. Paul and the others were “convinced” that God had called them to proclaim the Good News to them.

Psalm 67 is an ancient blessing, reminding the people to praise God in all they do, and asking for God’s blessings upon the peoples of the earth. While we often think of God as the God of Israel, there are many places within the Hebrew scriptures such as here where God is seen as the creator of all, the God of all people, and that God’s blessings are not just for a specific group of people, but that God’s blessings are received by all.

John 5:1-9 is the story of a miraculous healing by Jesus on the Sabbath. Jesus asks the man, “Do you want to be made well?” The man explains that he has been kept out of the water by the actions of others. This man had been ill for thirty-eight years and could not walk, but Jesus tells him to “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” By Jesus telling the man to “stand up,” he has literally had him stand up against oppression, against the voices that have told him no, against the very people who have gotten ahead of him and left him behind. If we want to be made well, we must stand up against injustice and oppression. We cannot just look to help ourselves, or we are no better than the ones getting ahead of the man and stepping in his way. We must look to help others in order to find our own healing.

John 14:23-29 is part of Jesus’ farewell discourse. As we prepare for Pentecost and the celebration of the Holy Spirit, we are reminded of Jesus’ words of assurance in the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will teach and remind us of what we need to know, and what we need to know is what Jesus shares next: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives.” In Christ, we have peace and assurance, even if the world is falling apart around us. We know that the Holy Spirit is working among us and reminding us of what we know, assuring us that we are part of something greater than ourselves, reminding us that God’s love is with us when we love Jesus. And we love Jesus by keeping his words—living out his commandment to love one another.

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5 contains the vision of the heavenly city. This vision comes from being “in the Spirit,” as John shares (21:10) and in this vision, there is no temple, for God is the temple. The gates will never be shut and people from all nations will be welcomed in. All things that belong to God will belong here.

As we prepare for Pentecost, in a sense we are preparing for the renewal of the Holy Spirit, for the divisions between earth and heaven to be broken down, for reality and dreams to become one. God’s love is powerful and transforming. People we would never expect, like Lydia—a woman who made money by her own means and seemed to have a satisfying life—she was still yearning for more. The man who waited beside the pool for years had to help break down the walls of oppression himself before he could escape the oppression that kept him from the healing waters.

The Holy Spirit is at work around us, and has been at work throughout the Bible. As we prepare for Pentecost, however, we are preparing for a revival, a renewal, a re-appearing of the Spirit in our lives. Perhaps the Spirit has never left us and has never left the world, but in preparing for it to come again, perhaps we will find the Spirit at work in us in a new way. And that work is the work of building up the reign of God on earth, as it is in heaven.

Call to Worship (from John 13:34-35 and 1 John 4:7, 11-12)

Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another.”

**By this, everyone will know that we are Christ’s disciples.**

With the help of God, let us love one another,

**Because love is from God, and we are from God.**

We are called into this vision from God, to love one another

**Because God loved us so much, he sent His Only Son for us.**

Let us join our hearts in worship

**Let God’s love be perfected in us. Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Life-giving Spirit, we confess that at times our vision is narrow. We are short-sighted in our love for one another and even in our love for ourselves. Call us out of our shells to recognize the wonders of Your creation and our brothers and sisters around us. Call us out of the tunnels of tasks and to-do lists into the fullness of life that You have given us. In the name of Jesus, our guide on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is all around us, calling to us, if we will but open our hearts to see and listen. Turn away from the distractions of everyday life, and know that God is with you. Take heart, you are not alone on this journey of faith. Amen.

Prayer

God of all people, may we bless one another in Your name. God of all creation, may we take care of the earth in Your name. God of the universe, may we open our minds to understanding more fully in Your name. God of all, may we swallow our pride at times, reach out to those who rub us the wrong way, and remember that You have created everything, and given everything enough space to grow and live. May we cultivate space for all things to grow and live into the fullness of Your intention of life. Grant us humility, and grant us peace. Amen.