Worship Resources for May 5, 2019—Third Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 9:1-6 (7-20); Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Narrative Lectionary: Peter’s Vision, Acts 10:1-17, 34-48 (Matthew 9:36-37)

As we read of the stories of the early Christians in Acts, we read Luke’s account of Paul’s conversion. Known as Saul, he sought to arrest members of The Way, as followers of Jesus were known then. But on his way to Damascus, he encountered the risen Christ. The experience makes Saul unable to see for three days, and his companions, though they heard the words, didn’t see anything. Christ calls upon Ananias in Damascus to help Saul. Ananias is uncertain, as he knew of Saul’s persecution, but Christ assures Ananias that Saul has been chosen to share the good news with the Gentiles, kings, and all people. After Saul’s sight is restored, he was baptized, and he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues. Paul has his own account in Galatians 1:13-17, and Luke tells the story again, slightly differently, in 22:4-16 and 26:9-18. Paul’s account in Galatians does not share the details that Luke does, but what we can gather is that something happened that changed Paul’s life forever. Something happened that caused him to see with fresh eyes who Jesus was and the people he was persecuting.

The psalmist praises God for healing in Psalm 30. The psalmist calls the congregation into praise, for God brings joy in the morning, turns grieving into dancing and clothes us with joy. God is the one who saves us from death, for it is in life that we praise God.

In John’s vision of the heavenly realm in Revelation 5:11-14, John beholds the angels, who cannot be numbered, singing praise to the Lamb. John sees Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, venerated like God the Creator is venerated. All of creation sings praise to God and to the Lamb, who are equal in this heavenly vision.

In the final chapter of John’s gospel account, the disciples experience the risen Christ one more time. This time, Peter and some of the others have gone fishing. Even though they’ve witnessed Jesus risen from the dead, they have gone back to who they used to be—fisherman. But after fishing all night and catching nothing, they hear a man calling to them from the shore, and they drop their nets one more time. If this seems familiar, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus calls the disciples from their fishing boats, and in Luke, Peter hauls up a miraculous catch in much the same way. John’s account places this at the end of the gospel instead of the beginning, marking a new start for the disciples. They can’t go back to who they used to be. Jesus makes them breakfast, and then asks Peter three times if he loves him (reminiscent of the three times Peter denied him). Jesus asks Peter to feed and care for his sheep and eludes to Peter’s death by martyrdom (not found in Scripture, but held by Christian tradition). After this, Jesus simply says, “Follow me.” Even in this season of resurrection, we are called to still follow Jesus, to leave the past behind and hold to what God is calling us to do.

The Narrative Lectionary shares the story of Peter’s Vision in Caesarea. In Acts 10:1-17, 34-48, a centurion named Cornelius was a “God-fearer”—these were Gentiles who had come to believe in one God, the same God as the Jewish people, but had not converted to Judaism. Cornelius has a vision from God, who tells him to wait for Simon Peter. Meanwhile, on the way to Caesarea, Peter also has a vision from God, in which God declares that what has been made clean must not be called profane. Peter has a revelation that God shows no partiality between Jew and Gentile, that all people are called to worship God and follow Christ, who is Lord of all.

In Matthew 9:36-37, Jesus has compassion on the crowd, seeing them as sheep without a shepherd, and that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

In this Easter season, we continue to experience the resurrected Christ in new ways, ways that break old borders and walls. Christ calls us to challenge what we’ve been taught as clean or pure. Christ challenges us to see what we may have been persecuting—that in our way of living our lives, we may be putting others in danger. In living out our faith, are we honoring Christ in all? Or are we creating unnecessary walls and boundaries? Are we still trying to go back to our old way of thinking, our old way of doing things? Can we look past our previous mistakes and feed the sheep of God, as Peter was called to do? May we cross the borders we have inflicted, tear down the walls we have built up, to see all people as God’s people, to seek the face of Christ in all.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 96:1-4, 9)

O sing to the Lord a new song;

**Sing to the Lord, all the earth.**

Sing to the Lord, bless God’s holy name;

**Tell of God’s salvation each and every day.**

Declare the glory of God among the nations,

**Tell of God’s marvelous works in your life.**

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,

**Worship the Lord in holy splendor, and be in awe of God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Fearless One, You have called us to be in awe of You, but we have allowed our fears to get the better of us. We easily slip back to old habits and patterns. We have difficulty accepting change. We set boundaries and walls to keep everything contained, but You have come to erase those boundaries and break down the walls. The Holy Spirit cannot be contained in a box, and neither can our faith, O God. Help us to follow You wherever You lead us, even when it is unfamiliar, even when we are afraid. O God, Your perfect love casts out our fear, and we are renewed and restored in You. Call us to be open to where You are leading us, on this journey of faith. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

We are the sheep of God’s hands, the people of God’s pasture, as the scripture tells us. Jesus called upon Peter to tend his sheep and feed his lambs. May we be fed and tended to in our need. May we feed and tend those around us. May we remember the voice that is calling us, and that we need not be afraid of falling astray or becoming lost, for we know the Shepherd’s voice. The Shepherd is leading us on a new path of justice, mercy, and peace, and we all are welcome. Be fed. Be cared for. Be renewed and restored. Amen.

Prayer

Sojourning God, You encounter us on this journey of life in unexpected ways and unexpected places. Throughout the Scriptures, You have shown us that You call us to help those in need on the side of the road. You stop us in our tracks when we are going the wrong way. You move us to be with people we would not normally associate with. You call us to rest when we want to press on in unhealthy ways, and You call us to carry on when we want to stop for selfish reasons. Even when we are resting, You are on the move around us. The world never stops turning, the solar system never stops revolving, the galaxies never stop spinning. Everything is in motion, including You, Sojourning God, Spirit of Life, the Resurrected Christ. In Your name we live and move and have our being. Amen.