Worship Resources for May 6, 2018—Sixth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

Narrative Lectionary: Partnership in the Gospel, Philippians 1:1-18a (Luke 9:46-48)

Peter proclaims that no one can be held back from belonging to Christ when they exhibit the gifts of the Spirit. Specifically, the works of the Spirit manifest themselves in such a way that no one can doubt that they come from God. Baptism is not a requirement for the Spirit to be present—the Spirit may already be at work. In this passage, all who heard the word from Peter, including some Gentiles present, began showing gifts from the Spirit, and Peter was amazed.

Psalm 98 is a song of praise for victory in battle. The psalmist calls upon the congregation to praise God, but also calls upon the whole earth, for the God of the people of Israel is the God of creation. God is the one who will judge the whole earth, who will judge all peoples with equity.

The writer of 1 John continues the discourse on love, that those who love God love Jesus, and love the children of God. To be a child of God means to obey the commandments, but the commandments are all about love. Love is the victory that conquers the earth, and that victory is found in Jesus, who conquered sin, death, and hell forever. The Spirit shows that Jesus is the one who came in love, who came by water and by blood.

John 15:9-17 is part of Jesus’ final speech to his disciples. In John’s Gospel account, the greatest commandment is summed up as love one another. This is a new commandment, given by Jesus, because as God loves us, so does Jesus, and so we ought to love one another. Jesus chose the disciples, and chooses all of us out of love, for no one has greater love than the one who lays down his life for others.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the beginning of Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi. Paul writes from prison, and gives thanks to the church in Philippi for their faithfulness and their love, and from their genuine hearts. Paul proclaims Christ not out of boasting, but out of love, and they know this. Paul mentions that he constantly prays for them and that he misses them and longs to be with them. Paul loves this church and holds it dear in his heart.

In Luke 9:46-48, the disciples argue over who is the greatest, but Jesus welcomes a child by his side and says to them, “Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me,” and “the least among all of you is the greatest.” Serving others, especially those often marginalized, left out and forgotten, is the greater gift.

Love is the greatest commandment, the one rule that all other rules fall under. The other Gospel accounts list two commandments: Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself, but the Johannine community understood that truly loving one another meant that you loved God, because you could not love God without loving others. All other commandments fall under that one. Love is what makes us children of God. Love is what brings us together. Love is what calls us to sacrifice ourselves for others, to lay down our own desires on the cross and follow Jesus in the footsteps of love.

Call to Worship (from Romans 13:8-10)

Owe no one anything, except to love one another;

 **Those who love one another have fulfilled the law.**

All of the commandments can be summed up under this:

 **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

Love does no wrong to a neighbor;

 **Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.**

This is what we know, what we worship:

 **God is Love, and Love will overcome all things.**

 **Come, worship God, and follow Christ’s way of love.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We confess to You, O Christ, that we have not loved as we ought. We have judged, despised, ridiculed, and envied others. We have measured others against metrics that we dare not measure ourselves. We have placed heavy burdens on others, expecting them to lift themselves by their bootstraps, while forgetting our own places of privilege. Forgive us, O Christ, for love ought to level the field, by bringing us down and lifting those from the margins. Forgive us, O Christ, for justice ought to call us into humility and repentance. Forgive us, O Christ, for mercy ought to remind us of Your great love for us. Forgive us, O Christ, that we receive grace and do not extend it. Call us into repentance, and lead us on right paths. In Christ’s name, the name of Love, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The Scriptures tell us time and again that God’s steadfast love endures forever. Forever. Forever. There is nothing you can do that will take God’s love away from you. But you can repent, and turn back, and know the fullness of God’s love, forgiveness, and mercy. Repent. Humbly seek forgiveness. Practice restorative justice. And know that God’s steadfast love endures forever. Forever. Forever. Amen.

Prayer

Holy Love, You are the one who fills us, nourishes us, and leads us on. You are the one who gave birth to creation and is birthing something new in us. You are the one who laid down Your life for us. You are the one who rose from death to bridge the gap between earth and heaven, to erase the dividing line of death, by love. May Your love overcome all our shortcomings, all our faults, all our hatred and suspicion and shame. May Your love burn bright in us, so that we might know one another by Your love and not by our own human measurements. Holy Love, be born in us again and again. Amen.