Worship Resources for May 7th, 2017—Fourth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

Narrative Lectionary: Ethiopian Eunuch Baptized, Acts 8:26-39 (Luke 24:44-47)

We continue reading chapter two of Acts—the last three weeks were Peter’s discourse on the day of Pentecost, and then the response of those listening, around three thousand who were baptized. These five verses tell how the early church came to form a community—how they shared what they had together, had the goodwill of the people, and made sure that everyone’s needs were met. They not only met at the temple, they came home and broke bread together, becoming a true movement, a family, a community together.

The most famous psalm, attributed to David, contain these ancient words of comfort. Psalm 23 uses the image of God as our Shepherd, who keeps us safe, leading us away from enemies into places of rest. Even in the darkest of valleys, God is present with us. Even in the presence of our enemies, we rest assured of God’s presence, a place prepared for us, and we know the goodness and mercy of our God.

1 Peter 2:19-25 speaks of the listeners being like sheep who had gone astray, but have come back to the Shepherd. If the listeners have suffered unjustly, they have suffered as Christ did. Christ did not seek retaliation, but healing, and we need to seek healing through Christ instead of vengeance. For Christ is our Shepherd, the guardian of our souls.

In John 10:1-10, Jesus takes the image of the shepherd a step further—Jesus is now the gate. He is the Shepherd by which the sheep enter the safety of the pen. If one climbs over the fence, they are a thief. Because the Good Shepherd calls the sheep by name, and they hear his voice, and he knows them. These sheep will not go astray because the know the voice of the Good Shepherd, who is the gate, who has come to bring abundant life.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch, who met Philip on his way home from Jerusalem. The Ethiopian is the treasurer for the queen of Ethiopia, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Philip interprets the scroll as referring to the Messiah, and tells the Ethiopian about Jesus, and the Ethiopian insists on being baptized, as there is nothing to prevent him. The Ethiopian is an outsider because he is a foreigner, and because he is a eunuch, not considered fully male in their society, but he understands that through Christ he is equal to all, and Philip baptizes him.

In Luke 24:44-47, Jesus opens the disciple’s minds to the scriptures, and explains that the Good News must be proclaimed to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. While the Gospels focus primarily on Jesus’ work among his own people, the Jews in Galilee and then on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus lays the groundwork for the future that goes beyond nation and race, and even gender and age—the Good News for All People.

The Lord is our Shepherd. Christ is the Good Shepherd. God is leading us into new life, if we listen for God’s voice. But we are also called to share that Good News with the world, and there is no barrier for God’s love, for as Paul says, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). Sometimes, in progressive Christian circles, we have become shy about sharing our faith in Christ. We don’t want to offend; we don’t want to cause harm. But we should not be afraid to hide our love for Christ. It doesn’t mean that we are out to convert everyone, but rather to share that we love our neighbors as ourselves because we love Christ. That we believe God’s love is for all people because of Christ. That we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God because we follow Christ, our Good Shepherd. We ought not to be ashamed, and to proclaim who we are and who we love.

Call to Worship

The Lord is my Shepherd,

 **I shall not want.**

The Lord makes me to lie down in green pastures

 **God leads us beside the still waters.**

The Lord restores our soul;

 **God leads us in right paths for God’s name’s sake.**

Come, worship God, our Good Shepherd,

 **Who calls each of us by name to follow Christ.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Healing and Compassion, we are quick to judge, quick to point blame, quick to want our kind of justice. Slow us down. Clear our heads. Remind us that we are in need of healing, and others are in need of healing, too. Fill us with compassion. Call us to quiet down and to listen to You first, and then to listen to others, rather than jumping to conclusions. Hold us to Your commandments, to know that You are the true judge, the one who brings justice that is restorative rather than retributive. Help us to love one another as You have loved us, forgiving one another as You have forgiven us. Turn us into compassionate people, ready to serve You and bring Your healing and justice to the world. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God loves you madly. God knows you have gone astray and have made mistakes and God loves you exactly the way you are. God is calling you back to the path. Listen for your name. Listen for God’s call. Listen, learn, and love, for God has loved you into being, and God will love you into abundant life. Amen.

Prayer

Great Creator, You have made us in Your image, and given us Your Creative Spirit. You have molded and shaped each one of us with gifts to create new art and new life. Help us to continue to make new things—through art, music, dance, poetry—all of the creative gifts You have given us. Help us to continue to make new opportunities for others to learn, love, live and create. Call us to be open to new possibilities, new ideas, and new ways of knowing Your love by accepting Your call to become co-creators with Christ our Lord. Amen.