Worship Resources for June 1st, 2014—Seventh Sunday of Easter, Ascension Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

We begin this last Sunday in Easter with the story of Jesus’ ascension in Acts. Only Luke and Acts (written by the same author) are there stories of Jesus’ ascension. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, and not to worry about what will happen next. As Jesus ascends into heaven, two angels ask the disciples why they are looking up towards heaven, because Jesus will return the way they saw him go. It is a good reminder for us—all too often, we are waiting for God to do something, looking up in the sky—when God is already among us, already at work in us.

Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 sings of God’s faithfulness to those who are righteous—who live rightly by God, which is to care for the poor, the widows and the orphans the way God cares for all of us. God is the one who leads the imprisoned to freedom, the homeless to homes, and provides for those in need. God calls us to live into God’s ways of righteousness and justice, and we will sing of God’s faithfulness as our worship.

The passages from 1 Peter 4 and 5 reminds us that in our suffering, to lean upon God and to give our burdens over to God, because God cares for us (5:7). We are called to resist evil, and that sometimes in our resisting evil, we struggle. But we can rest in God, for God is always with us. God gives us strength and endurance to persevere.

John 17:1-11 is part of the conclusion of a long final discourse by Jesus. Jesus asks God in prayer to protect those who follow him, but also prays that they may be one, as he and the father are one. Jesus’ greatest concern in this passage is unity, that we might know God because Jesus and God are one, and so we, as Christ’s body, ought to be one. How can we find unity in the midst of all the diversities around us? How can we find unity in the midst of conflict and struggle? Where do we find unity in Christ?

Are we waiting until the end to become one, or are we at work now towards unity in Jesus Christ? Is God at work in us now? We are reminded by the psalmist to work for what God desires: justice, mercy, and peace—and when we work for these things, we are working for unity, remembering the One who laid down his life for us, so we lay down our lives for others.

Call to Worship

God has given us everything

**God has given us new life in Christ.**

God has called us to be one in Christ

**Jesus calls upon us to love one another as God loves us.**

Jesus laid down his life for us

**And so we are called to lay down our lives for one another.**

Come, let us worship our God

**Let us follow Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we often insist on our own way. We make assumptions and judgments that harm some and exclude others. We turn away from our neighbor without knowing who our neighbor is. Forgive us for our selfish ways, and call us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to question our assumptions, to reserve judgment, and to err on the side of inclusion, as Jesus laid down his life for all of us. In Christ’s name we pray and seek forgiveness. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

We are not overlooked. We are sought after, we are searched for. God does not allow us to go missing or forgotten. God pursues us until we know God’s love and grace. Know that you are important, valued and loved. You are forgiven. You are restored. May you find renewal in your spirit. Amen.

Prayer

Creating God, stir in us the newness of life, that we may experience what You are doing in the world around us. Help us not to grow stale to the world, dim to Your light, but to reflect Your light and the newness of Your creation in all that we do. Inspire us to live for others, to love our neighbors and seek their well-being. In living for others, we find ourselves living out Your greatest commandment, knowing that You lived for us, so we live for others. Create in us the newness of life, that we might love, live, and share the joy found in You. In the name of Christ, who makes all things new, we pray. Amen.