Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year B

Focus: Fifth Sunday of Lent

Scripture: John 12:20–33 NRSV

Gathering
Welcome

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent. We join with other Christians who for many centuries have observed it as the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter, not counting Sundays.

Lent helps us center our attention on Jesus as we remember his life and ministry. Lent also provides a means to sharpen our focus on our own lives in relationship to Jesus. The Lenten season also encourages us to turn away from whatever distracts or blocks our commitment to discipleship.

May the season of Lent help us walk with Jesus, even though the path leads to the cross.

Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.

Light the peace candle.

Loving God,

We ask your Spirit and guidance to all human beings to bring peace and justice to the nations of the Earth.

Give your strength, clear wisdom, right motive, and attitude to help us stop poverty, war, violence, and all kinds of discrimination toward humankind, which faces great conflicts and issues throughout the world.

Inspire every human to work together to face the challenges and issues. Let everyone consciously unite to deal with such global issues as poverty, war, violence, racism, sexism, caste, nationalism, and global warming.

Enable us all to share unconditional love and resources delightfully and willingly, and treat everyone equally with dignity in every aspect of life.

We invite your Spirit and presence to bless the peacemakers of every nation as they bring love, peace, joy, hope, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit to all of your children. We ask this prayer in the name of the Prince of Peace, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Nanda Malla
Spiritual Practice

Personal Reflection

Prayerfully consider the following statement from “We Proclaim Jesus Christ” found in Sharing in Community of Christ. How does this statement help you conclude your Lenten journey and lead you into Holy Week? Print or project the reading.

We live and serve in hope that God’s kingdom of justice and peace will indeed come, bringing healing to the whole, groaning creation. Putting our trust in the Risen Christ, present among us by the Holy Spirit, we press on together, giving blessing, honor, and glory to God, now and forevermore.


End the reflection time by sounding a chime or bell.

Sharing Around the Table

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—’Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

—John 12:20–33 NRSV

Jesus tells his disciples what is about to happen. He desperately wants them to understand his purpose, his mission, and what it means—that his death will be an act of love and the culminating moment of his life. He speaks in tones of fear and anxiety, yet in contrast to other Gospel accounts, he flatly states he will not ask to be spared. “…It is for this reason that I have come…."

Some interpret Jesus’ act on the cross as an atoning sacrifice of innocent blood required by a God who demands ransom for justice. However, that interpretation is out of harmony with the nature of God revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus. The God revealed in Jesus is one of
boundless love and grace, healing mercy and peace. God’s action of healing love reaches out through Jesus Christ to reconcile all the creation to God. Not in anger, but in radical selfless love.

Second, through his act, Jesus teaches the powerful pattern of life as a disciple and what is required to follow in the way of the Christ. Jesus speaks to the heart of suffering love, dying to self, transformation, and new life. It is not needless suffering, but suffering for the sake of others in acts of love that reflect the image of God seen in the face of Christ. In this way, we can stand in solidarity with those who suffer needlessly because of poverty and other forms of systematic injustice.

Jesus goes on to underscore that what God does through him is for the sake of the world. It is for all nations and people of the Earth. “…And I, when I am lifted from the Earth, will draw all people to myself.”

As we die to self and follow Jesus without reservation all the way to the cross, we embody the personality and love of Jesus Christ. In him, we realize the transformation, healing, and reconciling of humanity. Extravagant love affects every relationship, as we become one in community and one in Christ.

Questions
1. How have you experienced suffering love, transformation, and new life?
2. How does the “way of the world” hold us captive and lead to “death” individually and collectively?
3. How have you experienced the extravagant love of God made real in Jesus Christ?

Sending
Generosity Statement
“Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f). We receive God’s grace and generosity. The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.
This offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Constant God, May we be dependable disciples. Your unconditional love for each of us is expressed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. May we faithfully respond to that ministry as we are accountable to one another, to you, and ourselves. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
We twice will sing CCS 450, “Lead Me, Lord,” at the close of each Sacred Space gathering during Lent.

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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*Light the peace candle.*

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FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT; Scripture: John 12:20–33
Questions

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Communion Statement

We come together to share in the Lord’s Supper “as a visible witness of loving Christian fellowship and shared remembrance of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:4a).

All committed followers of Christ are invited to partake, but no one should feel pressured to receive the emblems.

During this Lenten Season let us share in Communion as an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing *Community of Christ Sings* 527, “Bread of the World.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: small flashlight, cards with this prayer:

Lord, We pray that we might shine with the love of Jesus for all to see. Amen.

Today continues the season of Lent. During Lent we prepare for Easter. Many people observe Lent by fasting or giving something up until Easter. Others pray, read scripture, or do things that help them be better disciples.

Each Sunday during Lent we are talking about something we can do to prepare for Easter. Show the flashlight to the group. Ask: What is this? What is it used for? Talk to the children about light, about how it helps us see, makes us feel safe, and helps us find our way.

When we talk about Jesus we often say Jesus is the light of the world. Like a light, Jesus helps us feel safe and helps us find our way in life.

As disciples we can share the light of Jesus. We can be a friend to someone who is alone. We can share our belongings. And we can invite friends to church.

Today we have a prayer that reminds us to share the light of Jesus.

Hand out prayer cards and say: Place the prayer by your bed and say the prayer each morning when you get up.

Read the prayer aloud.

Lord, We pray that we might shine with the love of Jesus for all to see. Amen.