Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Third Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1–4 NRSV

Gathering

Welcome

Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*

*Light the peace candle.*

You are invited to join in prayer and meditation as you close your eyes and imagine yourself held in God’s loving hands. Be aware of your needs at this time, known to you and the One who calls you by your name.

*God of my life, may I receive your love, peace, and healing.*

*Pause 15 seconds.*

Imagine someone who is close to you being held in God’s loving hands. Perhaps this person is a good friend or someone with whom you are struggling.

*God of relationships, may this person receive your love, peace, and healing.*

*Pause 15 seconds.*

Envision all the people of the world, every nation and tribe, every town and village. Imagine those who live in oneness, as well as those ravaged by war and violence.

*God of all peoples, may these communities receive your love, peace, and healing.*

*Pause 15 seconds.*

Behold all that God has created. See the beauty of the Earth. Recognize the brokenness and destruction we have caused. Imagine all the beauty and the damage held in God’s loving hands.

*God of creation, may this planet receive your love, peace, and healing.*

*Pause 15 seconds.*
May this spirit of peace and compassion for ourselves, others, all people, and the Earth remain alive in us this day. Amen.

**Spiritual Practice**

**Walking in the Light**

During Epiphany and the season after Epiphany our spiritual practice will be “Walking in the Light.” Take a few moments to quiet yourself. When you feel calm, begin by imagining you are walking on a path of light. As we pray, visualize the light surrounding you. As the prayer continues, offer the gift of light to those close to you, to friends and acquaintances, to those you dislike or with whom you are in conflict, and to your community at-large.

Invite the group members to enter silence, close their eyes, release into a sense of calm, and imagine walking on a path of light.

As you hear each sentence, offer the gift of light to those mentioned.

**Pause 15 seconds.**

May my loved ones be embraced in God’s light.

May my family walk in the light of Christ.

**Pause 15 seconds.**

May my friends receive the gift of love and light.

**Pause 15 seconds.**

May my acquaintances sense the presence of light through our interactions.

**Pause 15 seconds.**

May the one with whom I am in conflict be surrounded by the light of Christ.

**Pause 15 seconds.**

May my community be blessed by the eternal light of God’s love and grace.

**Pause 15 seconds.**

Amen.

After the prayer invite people to share, as comfortable, any thoughts, emotions, or images they experienced during the practice of “Walking in the Light.”

**Sharing Around the Table**

**Isaiah 9:1–4 NRSV**

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter
time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

The people of Israel have been invaded by Assyria. They are living in a world of fear and oppression, a very real “darkness.” To them, the prophet Isaiah speaks words of hope and promise, “there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish.”

The significance of the image of light breaking through in this passage should not be missed. Feelings of hopelessness, fear, and anguish that often accompany sheer darkness quickly are replaced by hope, relief, and joy when light is available. The promise of deliverance offered by the “light” in today’s passage is a source of great joy to those who live under a yoke of oppression, regardless of its source.

Much of the world lives in fear caused by oppression, greed, corruption, and poverty. Others suffer under a constant threat of impending “darkness” due to racism, sexism, homophobia, and fear of the foreigner.

Christ came to be the light of the world. As followers of Christ, we are called to carry that light into the world...breaking the yoke of suffering and working for justice and fulfillment of God’s peaceable kingdom.

Questions

1. How have you or someone you know been trapped in “darkness” as a result of feeling marginalized, oppressed, or alone?
2. How does Christ’s love serve as a light to you in times of darkness?
3. How is God calling you to be a light to a world in darkness? What might that look like?

Sending

Generosity Statement

“Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:9).

The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.
The offering prayer for Epiphany is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Revealing God, May we always be generous. You have given each of us boundless grace and unending love. May our response to that love and grace be humble service to others, and may generosity be part of our nature. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 287, “Come and Bring Light”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

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

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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.

Let us celebrate the revelation of Christ in the world as we share in Communion as an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing from Community of Christ Sings 520, “God Extends an Invitation.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: small battery-operated candle, box with a lid (cut a small hole in the side of the box so children can peek inside), small pieces of paper, pencils.

Say: I have a box, and I think it is very dark inside it. Allow the children to peek through the hole to see the darkness.

Darkness sometimes is used to describe how people feel when they are sad, lonely, sick, afraid, or even angry. Sometimes when people are having a difficult time they say, “I am in a dark place.” Have you ever felt that way? Allow the children to share.

What happens to the darkness if I put a light in the box? (Turn on the candle, place it in the box, attach the lid, and allow the children to peek inside to see the light.)

Say: Light chases away the darkness. In the Bible, when people feel hopeful they say, “I saw a great light,” or “a light shone in the darkness.” This means they understand that God cares for them and always will be present with them.

Today let’s share the light of God with others by placing their names in our box of light. Then we can pray that the light of God will be with them.

Whose name would you like to place in the box of light?

Pass out the small pieces of paper and pencils so children and adults can put names in the box of light. Invite the children to collect the names from the adults and place them in the box of light.

When all names have been added, offer a short prayer that the God of love and light will be with all the people, and they will feel God’s love.

Thank the children for participating and invite them to return to their seats.