Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture: Micah 6:1–8 NRSV

Gathering
Welcome
Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle.

O God of justice and mercy,

We pray in the name of your Son, the Prince of Peace, for all those souls who suffer from the terror of oppression and war. When we hear the daily news concerning the strife of people in Afghanistan, Mexico, Syria, Yemen, and other places throughout the world, we are deeply saddened by their suffering. In our finer moments we might grieve for our nameless brothers and sisters. We can’t imagine their pain and anguish.

But how much more grievous their burdens must be to you, their Creator and their God. They are your children, as are we, and we know you love each of them far more than we can comprehend. Their oppressors also are your children, and you love them, too. Our compassion for them is paled by your compassion for them. Our concern for them is diminished by limited knowledge of their plight and absorption with our own day-to-day trials and tribulations. Your concern is borne on full understanding of their external pain and the anguish in their hearts. You hear their prayers and find ways to bless them despite their turmoil.

O God, we would pray for a righteous peace in all those places. Help us to become your peacemakers, your hands and feet, to bring about conditions that overcome injustice and lead to peace. Help us to recognize the need for peacemaking in our own neighborhoods, workplaces, schools. Bless our good desires, purify them, and make them righteous that we might be your servants in building the kingdom. Amen.

—Jim Davis
**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 a sense of calm, imagine you are walking on a path of light. As we pray, visualize the light surrounding you as you walk. 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 people 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.

- May my loved ones be embraced in God’s light.  
  *Pause 15 seconds.*

- May my family walk in the light of Christ.  
  *Pause 15 seconds.*

- May my friend 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.

At the conclusion of the prayer invite people to share, as they feel comfortable, any thoughts, emotions, or images they experienced during Walking in the Light.

**Sharing Around the Table**  
**Micah 6:1–8 NRSV**

Hear what the Lord says:

- Rise, plead your case before the mountains,  
  and let the hills hear your voice.  
- Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,  
  and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the Lord has a controversy with his people,  
and he will contend with Israel.

“O my people, what have I done to you?  
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!  
For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;  
and I sent before you Moses,  
Aaron, and Miriam.

O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,  
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,  
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.”

“With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

Today’s scripture is one of the most memorable and compelling from the Hebrew Bible. God calls on Israel to defend itself against serious accusations of wrongdoing. The word translated as *controversy* refers to legal action. God is both prosecutor and judge over the behavior and faithlessness of God’s people. God addresses the mountains and foundations of the Earth as if they were jurors in a court of law. In verse 3, Israel’s defense is that God has “wearied” them or led them to faithless behavior. There is no response because there is no fault against God. The fault lies with Israel.

There is no recitation of Israel’s wrongdoing. The hearers know what they have done. The purpose of God’s speech is not to focus on their sins, but to remind the people of God’s faithfulness.

God rescued the people from slavery in Egypt. God appointed leaders to guide them to the promised land. God was gracious even when the king of Moab hired a prophet to curse the Israelites. Over and over Israel deserved condemnation, but God responded with blessings instead.

God is in essence saying, “Remember! This is how I have acted toward you, to save you and redeem you, to bless you. You forget our covenant relationship, and I call you now to remembrance.”
The people answer in sorrow, describing the dilemma they face. Simple sacrifices are inadequate to bridge the gap between God’s holiness and the people’s sins. What rituals would ever be enough?

Then the voice of the prophet speaks a healing word. God requires nothing new, nothing the people haven’t already heard. Instead of ritual sacrifice and thoughtless worship, God requires acts of justice, mercy, and kindness toward others and deep humility toward God. Notice the order of these three ideas. Justice toward others comes first, followed by kindness. Compassionate, merciful human relationships are the most important. Only then can the people walk humbly with God in a covenant relationship.

Today we do not need ritual sacrifices to worship God. The challenge of bringing justice in the world, living in merciful relationships with others, and continuing lives of humility towers above any ritualistic demands of past or current ages. The scripture passage presents us with a call to live fully and faithfully in covenant with God as we bring healing and justice to others. It is the highest calling to which we can aspire, requiring us to sacrifice self-interests so we may bless and uplift others.

Questions
1. What societal demands and influences prevent you from being in authentic relationship with God and with others?
2. How do you sense the Spirit’s call to bring healing and justice to your community?

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 gifted each of us with 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 300, “What Does the Lord Require”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

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

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  *Pause 15 seconds.*
- May my family walk in the light of Christ.  
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- May my acquaintances sense the presence of light through our interactions.  
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- 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.

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Communion Statement

Choose one scripture to read from this selection: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–39.

Invitation to Communion

All are welcome at Christ’s table. The Lord’s Supper, or Communion, is a sacrament in which we remember the life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ. In Community of Christ, we also experience Communion as an opportunity to renew our baptismal covenant and to be formed as disciples who live Christ’s mission. Others may have different or added understandings within their faith traditions. We invite all who participate in the Lord’s Supper to do so in the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

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 527, “Bread of the World.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: paper hearts (ensure there are enough for the whole group), washable markers

Say: “I would like visit with you about doing chores. Some children have chores like clearing the table or making their bed. Do you have any chores at home or at school?”

Ask children to talk about their chores; help small children respond (e.g., washing hands, putting away toys, handing out papers, sitting quietly at their desk).

Ask: What is the most important thing you are expected to do? Encourage and affirm responses.

Today we are talking about a scripture that identifies what God expects us to do. Do you have any idea what the important things are that God asks of us? Encourage and affirm responses.

Here are the things God asked of the people:

- To treat people fairly. How can you be fair? (e.g., share, take turns, help others).
- To act in kindness. What does it look like to be kind? (allow a moment for children to respond)
- To be humble. (to not think or act as if we are more important than others)

I have some paper hearts for each of us (hand out hearts and markers). On our hearts we can write, “I am kind,” or “I am fair,” or “I am humble.”

You can help an adult or ask someone to help you write on the heart.

This week try to live your heart message at home, at work, or at school. If you write, “I am kind,” remember to act kindly to others. If you write, “I am fair,” remember to share with others, to take turns, to be helpful. If you write, “I am humble,” try to treat people with respect. Remember that everyone is important, and everyone is loved by God.

Allow a few minutes for participants to write on their paper hearts. If there is time you may ask if children would like to share what they wrote and how they might do it in the coming week.

Close by offering a short prayer of thanks for the heart messages and the fairness, kindness, and humility of the children and adults.