Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:15–20 NRSV

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

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

Eternal God,

Together we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, for the gift of joy to share in a world without joy. Our world searches but does not find true joy.

For the gift of hope to share in a world without hope. Our world searches but does not find real hope.

Share these gifts in the spirit of forgiveness and compassion to release hate from lives in our world that knows hate. With these gifts may we be a light in a world unaware of your light, that we may be a catalyst for a community of joy, a community of hope, a world of peace.

Together we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Mark S. Allen

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**

*Deuteronomy 30:15–20 NRSV*

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

The words of Moses in today’s scripture cut to the heart of the law God gave the Israelites and the history of their relationship with the Divine. Simple, clear, and direct, the words stress the importance of serving only one God. The outcome is stated with razor-sharp clarity: There are two roads, and the people must choose which way they will go. The first way is
obedience to God’s instruction, which leads to life and covenant relationship. The second way is disobedience, which leads to idolatry, loss of identity, and death.

These verses are part of a speech credited to Moses when he addressed the Israelites in the land of Moab near the end of his life. He recounts the history of God’s saving acts toward them. They are to love God, walk in godly ways, and keep the commandments God has given them. The land they are about to enter, Canaan, is occupied by people who worship other gods. The temptation to turn to idols and be influenced by the culture and rituals of the Canaanites will prove to be strong and compelling. The clash of religious ideals is about to begin, and the heart of all the laws given to the Israelites is to worship God alone.

God promised to give the people land and longevity. God will provide for their needs through all generations. In return, the people have agreed to be faithful and obedient and to turn from worshiping other gods. Those are the terms of the contract, the covenant.

If the people do not keep the covenant, death is the natural result. God will not actively destroy the Israelites because of their disobedience. However, the warning is a statement of what happens when the people forget and turn to idols. They lose the close, loving relationship with God.

Questions

1. What forms of idolatry tempt us today? What loyalties conflict with our faith and commitment to God?
2. How do your choices affect the broader community?
3. A Community of Christ Enduring Principle, Responsible Choices, states, “Many aspects of creation need redemption because of irresponsible and sinful human choices.” Where do you see the need for redemption because of sinful human choices?

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 389 “This Is My Song”

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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- 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**  
**Deuteronomy 30:15–20 NRSV**

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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

Say: Today our scripture is about making a covenant with God. A covenant is like a promise. When we covenant with God, we are promising God that we will remember to do as God asks us to do. The covenant we are talking about is the covenant to walk in the ways of God. In other words, it is to follow in God’s footsteps.

Let’s practice following in my footsteps.

Have the children line up behind you and follow in your footsteps as you walk around the room. Alternate between short and long strides.

Ask: How easy was it to follow in my footsteps? Encourage the children to share their experience.

Say: We walk in the ways of God, or follow in God’s footsteps, when we love God by loving others around us. How can we show the love of God to others?

Encourage the children to share and affirm the answers. When they are done, thank them for participating. Offer a short prayer of thanks for the children as they learn to follow in God’s ways.