Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Transfiguration Sunday

Scripture: Matthew 17:1–9 NRSV

Gathering

Welcome

Transfiguration Sunday connects Jesus to the prophets of old and sets the stage for the life, death, and resurrection that is to come.

Prayer for Peace

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

O God, our Creator, Creator of peace, Author of tranquility, Bringer of calm, Chariot of hope: May we attune our minds to your peace in creation. Help us to see the way of peace brought by your divine hand even in the chaos of nature. Help us to feel the loving touch of parenthood in your creative, watchful care. May we know you as Creator of peace.

O God, our Companion, Companion of peace, Vessel of equanimity, Purveyor of justice, Sacrifice of love: May we attune our hearts to the peace of Jesus Christ. Help us to see the way of peace offered to humanity even in the throes of our rebelliousness. Help us to feel your healing touch for humanity in your wondrous gospel story. May we know you as Companion of peace.

O God, our Presence, Presence of peace, Voice of welcome, Provider of hospitality, Indwelling of joy: May we attune our beings to meditate on your peace. Help us to know the wisdom of peace even in the sound of our own breath. Help us to understand the mindfulness of liberated spirit possible in the rest of your comforting Holy Spirit. May we know you as Presence of peace. Amen.

—Glenn Johnson

Spiritual Practice

Jesus Prayer

This prayer is an ancient spiritual practice from Orthodox Christianity. It is a way of connecting with the gracious Spirit of Christ as we ask to receive his mercy. The prayer comes from the scripture of the blind man calling Jesus to heal him.
Let your breath become slow and even.
I will speak the prayer aloud for the first few breaths, and then you will pray silently, repeating the phrases as you breathe.
As you breathe in pray, “Lord Jesus Christ.”
As you breathe out pray, “Have mercy on me.”
We will prayerfully repeat these words for two or three minutes.
Lead the group by modeling:
(Breathe in while you say, “Lord Jesus Christ.”)
(Breathe out while you say, “Have mercy on me.”)
Continue modeling for a total of three repetitions. Then continue the breathing while silently praying the words as you instructed.
Continue for two to three minutes.
Close with an “Amen.”
Invite people to share about this experience.


Sharing Around the Table
Matthew 17:1–9 NRSV

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

The season of Epiphany celebrates the appearances of God among God’s people, both in the time of Moses and in the time of Jesus.

This scripture is used on Transfiguration Sunday because it compares the experience of Moses on Mount Sinai with the transfiguration experience of Jesus.

Let us examine the parallels between the accounts. Moses took with him Joshua, his assistant. Jesus took his three most trusted disciples: Peter, James, and John. The presence of God on Mount Sinai took the form of a cloud and devouring fire. After Jesus was transfigured, a bright cloud representing the presence of God settled on them, and God spoke from the cloud.

While Moses was on the mountain with God, the people persuaded Aaron to make a golden calf to worship. Similarly, when Peter saw Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, he offered to make three booths to shelter them.
When God speaks from the cloud, (“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him, I am well-pleased; listen to him!”) the understanding is that Jesus is more important than the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah). His words and teachings take precedence over the ancient laws and counsel.

God giving the law on Mount Sinai represented a key episode in the history of the Jews. The transfiguration put that law in perspective for Christian faith. Both Jews and Christians celebrate a God who is present with us and walking with us on our journey of faith. Whether providing guidance or redemptive love, God is present and active, bringing grace and mercy into broken lives.

Questions

1. How would you react if God called you to climb a mountain and be in the presence of the Divine? Who would you take with you? What preparations would you make?
2. When have you witnessed the glory of God shining through everyday life and transforming people or creation?

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.

This offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Transforming God, May our lives be transformed by your love, grace, and generosity. 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 569, “Transform Us”

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

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: We are going to play a game called “Brave or Afraid.” I will say a place or activity, and you decide if you would be brave or afraid.

First, let’s learn our “brave” and “afraid” poses. If we feel brave, we stand up tall, feet spread apart, with our hands on our hips. If we feel afraid, we collapse on the floor, face down, covering our eyes.

Have the group practice “brave” and “afraid” postures.
Let’s begin. Remember, I will say a place or activity, and you decide if you would stand tall and “brave” or collapse face down on the floor, “afraid.”

- Go to the dentist
- Meet a green, one-eyed monster
- Jump into the deep end of the swimming pool
- Go to the first day at a new school
- Ride an upside-down roller-coaster
- Walk down a dark hallway at a friend’s house
- Eat cooked snails

After playing the game, tell the story of the scripture:
Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to climb a high mountain with him. Do you think they were brave or afraid? Receive answers. (Brave, they climbed the mountain.)

On the mountain Jesus became like a bright light and a vision of Elijah and Moses appeared. Do you think they were brave or afraid? Receive answers. (Brave, they even wanted to build houses for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.)

Then a cloud came overhead, and a voice said, “This is my son, listen to him.” Do you think they were brave or afraid? Receive answers. (Afraid. They fell face down on the ground.)

Then Jesus said, “Get up, do not be afraid.” Do you think they were brave or afraid? Receive answers. (Brave, because Jesus was with them.)

Like Peter, James, and John, some things can scare us. But when we remember that Jesus is always with us in our hearts, we can get up, be brave and unafraid.

Thank everyone for participating and ask them to return to their seats.