Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: First Week of Lent

Scripture: Matthew 4:1–11 NRSV

Gathering
Welcome

Lent is a time for personal and community spiritual renewal. The Lenten season is the 40 days (excluding Sundays) between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. As we journey with Jesus we are called into the wilderness to prepare for something new. In this wilderness we confront the most painful parts of ourselves, face our weaknesses, and await the transforming power of grace, hope, and resurrection.

Prayer for Peace

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

During the Lenten season we will use a verse from CCS 221, “Spirit of Christ, Remember Me,” as our prayer for peace.
I will read aloud verse 1. Then I will read it phrase by phrase, and you will repeat each phrase after me. I will close with Amen.
Read verse 1 aloud from CCS 221, “Spirit of Christ, Remember Me.”
Say: “Repeat after me.”
Read the first phrase of CCS 221, verse 1, aloud. Wait for congregation to repeat.
Proceed in that way through the entire verse.
Close with, “Amen.”

Spiritual Practice
Practice of Silence

Practicing silence may be difficult at first. The mind may run wild. Allow yourself grace in this practice. We will begin when I ring the chime. We will be silent for five minutes. I will ring the chime again at the conclusion of our time of silence.
Remember to breathe deeply. Focusing on each breath can help quiet the mind. Become aware of your surroundings; notice how the air feels on your skin; trust that you are in the presence of the holy—fully surrounding and embracing you. Allow your inner conversations to stop for a while, being fully present with the One who is fully present with you.
Ring a chime to begin.
Wait five minutes.
Ring the chime to conclude the period of silence.
Ask: How does it feel to be present with God in silence?

Sharing Around the Table
Matthew 4:1–11 NRSV

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,’  
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.’”

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

On this, the first Sunday of Lent, we are invited to journey into the wilderness with Christ following his baptism. Still dripping wet from his baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. It was a time for Jesus to open himself up, and he became vulnerable to the temptations that face us in our humanity.

The temptations Jesus faced came after 40 days of fasting. Jesus was famished. The first temptation, to turn stones into bread, seemed intended to tempt Jesus to focus on his own need and away from his greater mission. In the words, “If you are the Son of God,” Jesus’ own sense of identity was challenged to raise doubt in his mind. Courage and strength can wane in the face of doubt.

The second temptation, to throw himself down from the temple and allow the angels to bear him up, invited Jesus to test God’s faithfulness. Jesus resisted this temptation because testing God is not about trust, but rather lack of trust. Our human tendencies often can lead us to place conditions on God of performing to our expectations before we claim our faith in God.
In the third temptation, Jesus was offered all power and dominion over “the kingdoms of the world” in return for falling down and worshiping something other than God. These temptations offered Jesus comfort, power, and wealth. Instead, he chose a journey of sacrifice that would bring God’s justice for all.

As disciples, we face similar struggles. Too often we fall into the pattern of misuse of power and seeking the easy way to live our discipleship.

For Matthew, the questions Jesus had faced and wrestled with were: Who will I be in God? And what is God’s wish for my life? In this text we are confronted with the question: Will we be someone different from whom God calls us to be? The temptations we face in our daily lives (materialism, doubt, misdirection, false worship, prestige, and power) press us to ask similar questions.

Questions

1. How are you tempted to take the easy road to discipleship?
2. What things in your life do you need to confront to become whom God is calling you to be? What is holding you back?

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 Lent is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Ever-present God, Forgive us when we are less than loving, less than hope-filled, less than you have created us to be. Your mercy and grace are always with us. May we find strength in your presence, and may we respond to your love with generous spirits.

Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 453, “When We Are Tested”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
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**Spiritual Practice**

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—Adapted from a *Guide for Lent, www.CofChrist.org/a-guide-for-lent*
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Amen.
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.

During this Lenten season let us share in Communion as an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community. In preparation let’s sing from Community of Christ Sings 526, “Is There One Who Feels Unworthy?”
Thoughts for Children

Say: People prepare for God’s presence in many ways. Some fast (not eating from sunup to sunset). Others gather for prayer or worship. Others find a quiet place to wait in silence.

We are going to practice “Entering the Silence.” This spiritual practice helps us feel God’s presence. As we enter the silence, everyone should try to remain as quiet as possible.

Find a comfortable place to sit. (Children may wish to sit or lie on the floor.) Ready? Close your eyes. We will breathe in and out three times slowly.

In…out…
In…out…
In…out…

I will give some directions. Try to follow them silently. We will have time to share at the end.

Listen and hear the silence. What do you hear?
Listen and see the silence. What can you see?
Listen and taste the silence. What does it taste like?
Listen and smell the silence. Can you smell it?
Breathe in…and out…
Listen and hold your arms out to embrace the silence.
Now rest your hands in your lap.
Let’s open our eyes.
What was it like to sit in the silence?
What did you see or hear in the silence?
Does silence have a taste or a smell? What is it?
Could you sense the presence of God in the silence?

After children have shared, thank them for doing this spiritual practice. Offer a short prayer: “God, thank you for being with us in the silence of this day. Amen.”

“Entering the Silence” is based on a practice of the Seneca (First People) Nation. The imagery is adapted from the words of Twylah Nitsch.