Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Second Week of Lent

Scripture: John 3:1–17 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 2. Then I will read it phrase by phrase, and you will repeat each phrase after me. I will close with Amen.

Read verse 2 aloud from *CCS 221,* “Spirit of Christ, Remember Me.”

Say: “Repeat after me.”

Read the first phrase of *CCS 221,* verse 2, 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
John 3:1–17 NRSV

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Scholars believe Jesus was in Jerusalem for the meeting with Nicodemus as told in John 3:1–17. This passage is known for two foci. The first is on the words in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

But it also is known for the story of Nicodemus coming to see Jesus in the dark. Later, after Jesus’ death, he comes with spices and oils to help carry the body to the tomb (John 19:39–42).

Although today’s passage ends at verse 17, if we include verses 18–21, we see a recurrence of the theme of light and darkness. That theme seems clearly connected to Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night and his search for light. Our story follows a familiar pattern found in
John. The first part deals with a sign or signs, followed by a discussion, then a closing with Jesus teaching about the topic.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, is a leader among the Jews. He is a teacher, interpreter, guardian of the law, and member of the ruling council. He comes to talk to Jesus, ask him questions, and see for himself this person who is performing all these signs.

Jesus’ reference to being born from above is a way of saying God is the one who gives us life. God is laboring to bring us to new life. According to Jesus, one needs to be born from above of water and Spirit. The Spirit plays an important role in John, who refers to the Spirit as the Comforter or Advocate who will stay with us when we carry on Jesus’ work.

When Jesus again speaks to Nicodemus, the word you becomes plural. Jesus addresses everyone with the words in verses 17 and 18. Jesus is stating how much God loves each of us. Jesus is the light sent into the world. It is up to us to respond to this love and light and live in it instead of in darkness.

Questions

1. What joy in your life comes from understanding the message and ministry of Jesus Christ?
2. How do you identify with Nicodemus? How is God disrupting your life, calling you to understand things in a new way?

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 207 “Creator of Sunrises”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
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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.

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

Materials: globe or world map

Say: Our scripture today tells us that God so loved the world. Here is a map (or globe) that shows the whole world. Point to where you are.

Say: Here we are in this part of the world. What does God love about our part of the world (people, animals, mountains, flowers)? Encourage the children to respond.

Point to another part of the world and ask: Does God love this part of the world, too? Yes! God loves all of the world. What do you think God loves in this part of the world (name some people, places, or animals from that area)?

Repeat with one more area of the world, identifying people, places, or animals and assuring the children that God loves all the world.

Say: Let’s pick a place in the world and offer a prayer of blessing for the people, the plants, and the animals that live and grow there. Help the children choose an area of the world.

Ask them to place their hands on that part of the map (or globe) as you pray.

Lord, please bless the people of ______________.

Bless the plants that grow here and the animals that live here.

Help us remember that you love all the people of the world and all of your creation.

Amen.

When you go home you can use a globe or world map to learn. Close your eyes and then point to a place to learn about and to pray for the people, animals, and environment there. You can learn more about the place you choose by researching it online or at a library.

You can do this each week to learn about a new place, new people, new animals, and plants. Then keep all of them in your heart and pray for them each day.