Sacred Space: a Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Third Week of Lent

Scripture: Exodus 17: 1–7 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 3. Then I will read it phrase by phrase, and you will repeat each phrase after me. I will close with Amen.

Read verse 3 aloud from *CCS* 221, “Spirit of Christ, Remember Me.”

Say: “Repeat after me.”

Read the first phrase of *CCS* 221, verse 3, 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
Exodus 17:1–7 NRSV

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

Each Lenten scripture reading challenges hearers to inspect their lives to identify changes they can make.

Two months after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and began their long journey, they camped in the wilderness near Mount Sinai. Their food was gone. They were hungry, and they began to complain. In response, God sent quails and manna for them to eat. Later in their journey, when they had no water and became thirsty, they began grumbling. Moses became irritated. He asked why they were testing the Lord by doubting God’s ability to care for them. They continued to complain and make accusations against Moses.

Moses usually prayed patiently for the people. This time, Moses complained to God about the accusations of his people. Then he followed God’s instructions. He went before the people with his staff to Mount Horeb. When he struck a rock there, water came forth. The scripture passage says God stood on the rock or was present with them.

The area has springs of water below the limestone rocks. One is called Massah, which means “test.” The other is called Meribah, or “quarrel,” to commemorate how the Israelites quarreled with Moses.

The writer of Exodus presents the generation of Israelites in the wilderness in the worst possible light. People who are starving or dying of thirst naturally would cry to God. Those whose future is uncertain naturally would despair and second-guess decisions. Where is the line between negativity and legitimate concerns?

In today’s world, grumbling and complaints are everywhere. People of faith often have as many complaints as those who do not know God. Yet, God continues to bear patiently with humankind. God is present even in our frustration, loneliness, and despair. Such is the grace of God.
Questions

1. What events in your life reflect a wilderness journey? How have you felt God’s presence?
2. How does this Lenten story challenge people to change their negative attitudes and self-centered complaints?
3. What does it say about desperate circumstances that prompt genuine lamentations and petitions to God?

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 209 “Lord, Lead Me by Your Spirit”

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: pitcher of water and cups

Ask: Have you ever been really thirsty? What does it feel like? Encourage the children to share.

The people with Moses were thirsty. They were in a hot desert, and there was no water. They were hot, tired, and cranky. They began to think God did not care about them.

Moses asked God what to do. God led Moses to a place where water could be found for the people to drink. We tell this story to remind us that God does care for us, even when we are hot, tired, and cranky.

Today, to help us remember God always cares for us, we will have a water-prayer. I will pour cups of water for each of us. We will wait until everyone has a cup. Then, together, we will take a sip with each phrase of the prayer.

Repeat after me:

God is good (God is good). *Sip the water.*

God is love (God is love). *Sip the water.*

God loves us (God loves us.) *Sip the water.*

Amen (Amen). *Sip the water.*

Collect the cups and thank the participants.