Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Second Sunday of Easter

Scripture: John 20:19–31 NRSV

Gathering

Welcome

Today is the second Sunday of the Easter season. The Easter season continues for 50 days and concludes with the Day of Pentecost.

Prayer for Peace

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

Creator God:

Embrace this day, O God, those without power. Protect them from the whims of the world. Give them the courage to stand for the right to separate themselves from a world that offers no hope. Shine the light of your goodness in front of them and guide them into your vision for them. A vision of joy and satisfaction. Sharing in a world community of love. Help each of us spread this good news as we travel through our own lives.

Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Centering Prayer

Read the following to the group:

Centering prayer is a meditation used by Christians to sit in silence with God. This prayer helps us experience God’s presence within us. This Easter Day we will focus on the word peace.

Slowly read the following instructions:

Sit with posture relaxed and eyes closed. We will spend three minutes in centering prayer. We will breathe in a regular, natural rhythm. As you breathe in and out, you will say the word peace in your mind. You will continue breathing in and out, focusing only on your prayer word.

At the end of the three minutes, I will ring a chime, and we will sit for two minutes in silence, eyes closed, listening to the silence.

Begin the practice together, modeling the centering prayer as instructed above.
Say: Become aware of your natural breathing in and out. (Breathe a few times in and out.)

Say: Now silently add your prayer word. (Model breathing in and quietly saying peace. Breathe out and say peace quietly. Continue the centering prayer in silence. Discontinue saying the prayer word out loud after you model it the first time.)

After three minutes, ring a chime.

Sit quietly for two minutes.

When time is up, share these closing instructions: Silently offer a brief word of thanks to God, take a deep breath, and open your eyes when ready.

When everyone’s eyes are open, share the following: I encourage you to use this spiritual practice at home during the week.

Sharing Around the Table
John 20:19–31 NRSV

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The Gospel of John was written many years after the resurrection of Jesus. It clarifies and addresses many of the author’s concerns for the struggling early Christian communities. The disciples, filled with grief and despair, are in a locked room. Their teacher and friend has just been killed, and their world turned upside down. Huddled together, they fear for their safety.

Then, despite the locked door, Jesus appears in their midst, bringing words of peace.
The words Christ speaks to the disciples empower and encourage them. Jesus speaks peace, commissions the disciples to go out, and breathes the Spirit into them. The promised Comforter is now with them, and they are not alone.

Jesus is gone when Thomas joins them, and though the disciples provide a detailed account of Christ’s presence, Thomas will not believe unless he sees for himself. A week later Jesus appears again, urging Thomas to believe. Thomas’ proclamation, “My Lord and my God!” becomes the witness of generations to come that “have not seen” but still “come to believe.” Twenty-first-century disciples can relate to many parts of this scripture story. Like the early disciples, we experience fear and doubt.

For John, faith occurs amid the uncertainties of life. Through encounters with the Risen Christ we become the people Jesus described as he spoke to Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Questions

1. When have you withdrawn from the world because of fear or uncertainty?
2. How have you struggled with doubts and uncertainty on your journey of faith?
3. How have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter?

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:

God of rejoicing, We share with joy-filled hearts in response to the presence of your Son. May the offerings we share bring joy, hope, love, and peace into the lives of others that they might experience your mercy and grace. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 662 “Peace Be with You”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Creator God:

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**Spiritual Practice**

**Centering Prayer**

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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.

This Easter season let us experience the resurrected Christ as we share in Communion as an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community. In preparation let’s sing from Community of Christ Sings (select one):

CCS 515, “In These Moments We Remember”
CCS 516, “Coming Together for Wine and for Bread”
CCS 521, “Let Us Break Bread Together”
CCS 525, “Small Is the Table”
CCS 528, “Eat This Bread”
Thoughts for Children

Jesus visited his disciples and said to them, “Peace be with you.” Jesus was reminding his friends to be people of peace. What does it mean to be a person of peace, to have peace with you? Encourage the children to share.

One way we remember that Jesus calls us to be people of peace is to share the peace of Christ with others. This is called “Passing the Peace.” It looks like this: Turn to the person on your right and say, “Peace be with you.” That person then says, “Also with you.”

Let’s practice saying those two things together, “Peace be with you.” “Also with you.”

Now let’s pass the peace to each person in the room.

Give the children and adults time to pass the peace. Watch to ensure no one is left out. Thank the children for participating.