Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Third Sunday of Easter


Gathering
Welcome

Today is the third 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, we come to this place to worship you, but we also come to find peace. Open our hearts to you, still our spirits, and free our minds to hear your voice. May this flame of peace warm each of us to your spirit of blessing, to your calming presence and to your healing love. May this sacred time prepare us to be peacemakers in our homes...schools...workplaces...cities...countries...and our world. Make us one, loving God, through your peace. Amen.

Spiritual Practice
Centering Prayer

Read the following to the group:
Today we are continuing with the season of Easter and the theme of resurrection. Witnessing creation teaches us that creation can be chaotic. And certainly the Easter story reveals a divine wildness and chaos beyond anyone’s expectations. As our everyday lives unfold in ways we never expected, can we open our hearts to the unexpected?
Today we will practice centering prayer as we experience the unexpected in our lives. During the prayer we will choose the words *open heart* as our focus. We will sit in silence breathing the words in and out.
Centering prayer is a method of mediation used by Christians to sit in silence with God. This prayer helps us experience God’s presence within us.
Slowly read the following instructions:
Sit with relaxed posture and close your eyes. 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 words *open heart* in your mind. You will continue breathing in and out, focusing only on your prayer words.

At the end of the three minutes in centering prayer, 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 words. (Model breathing in and quietly saying *open*. Breathe out and say *heart* quietly. Continue the centering prayer in silence. Discontinue saying the prayer words 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**

*Luke 24:13–35 NRSV*

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the
table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Two travelers were walking to the village of Emmaus. Jesus appeared and joined them. As they walked, he listened to them discussing the awful events of the past few days in Jerusalem. They seemingly were so lost in their sorrow and pain that they did not recognize him. Jesus asked what had occurred in Jerusalem. He listened as they described their disappointment, disillusionment, and frustrations. As Jesus prepared to part company with the travelers, they invited him to dine with them. He accepted their hospitality. As Jesus blessed and broke bread they recognized him as Christ. The travelers experienced the Resurrected Christ in the blessing and breaking of bread.

These interactions at the table with Jesus prompted them to return to Jerusalem and testify of the Living Christ.

Questions

1. When have you been like the travelers, overwrought with difficult issues in your life?
2. How have you received simple acts of invitation and hospitality that opened your eyes to a new understanding of discipleship?
3. How has God been revealed to you in the blessing and breaking of bread?

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 552, “We Are Companions on the Journey”
Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group
- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
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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 Community of Christ Sings 521, “Let Us Break Bread Together.”
Thoughts for Children

Note: If you are including the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper today, provide the Thoughts for Children just prior. It will provide a poignant time of preparation for the whole group.

Materials: tray with unsliced loaf of bread, cubes of cheese, small pieces of fruit (if you are using grapes, slice them in half), napkins

Place the tray on the floor or on a low table. Invite the children to sit with you.

Say: One time, when they were eating together, Jesus picked up a loaf of bread, broke it in half, and told his disciples, “Every time you break bread, remember me.”

After Jesus died and rose again, his disciples were walking to another town. A man they did not recognize walked with them. The disciples invited him to eat with them.

They sat around a low table, just like we are sitting now. They may have had fruit (offer each child some fruit). They may have had some cheese (offer cheese to each child).

But then the man picked up the loaf of bread and broke it in half (break bread in half).

When he did that, guess what happened?

They suddenly realized the man was Jesus. He had been with them all along.

When we gather with others to eat and to “break bread,” we also remember Jesus and how he is present with us. We recognize him in the love we share with one another, in the joy of being together, and in the kindness we show to others.

Give each child a chunk of bread. Break your bread in half and remember that Jesus is always with us. Encourage the children to share bread with others in the group.