Sacred Space: a Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Fifth Sunday of Easter

Scripture: Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16

Gathering
Welcome

Today is the fifth 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.

Gracious God and precious Friend,

Extend your peace throughout creation in flowing ribbons of love. Let all who seek you know your presence and be moved to greater acts of peace in their communities. May they know your infinite tenderness and intimate friendship as they seek greater knowledge of you. Bring your presence to those struggling with loneliness and uncertainty, that they may understand your desire for their companionship and reach out to you in love. Be with those who feel weak and useless, that they would find strength in their trials and the confidence to share this strength with others.

Above all, we pray that your peace, love, and grace would impress upon our hearts the desire to serve you. As we go from this sacred place, may we carry your peace and love with us to all the corners of the world. In Jesus’ most precious name we pray. Amen.

—Molly Bagley

Spiritual Practice
Centering Prayer

Read the following to the group:

We continue with the season of Easter and the theme of resurrection. During Centering Prayer we choose a focus word. We sit in silence breathing the word in and out. For today’s prayer our word is Light.

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 Light.
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 Light 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 Light. Breathe out and say Light 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**

**Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16 NRSV**

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.

Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

...My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Psalm 31 moves from words of despair and danger to expressions of trust in God’s steadfast love. While surrounded by danger, the psalmist seeks safety—refuge, deliverance, and rescue. Images of God as protector are mentioned: rock, fortress, and refuge. The writer realizes
that even the faithful children of God face threats and danger. This petition for God’s help is made with confidence and trust that God’s presence will be enough.

There is a sense of connection between desperation and faithfulness in this psalm. The writer asserts, “My times are in your hand,” meaning every moment, day, and year—even the bad ones—are turned over to God with confidence. God’s love eventually will prevail.

The psalmist asks God to “deliver” and “save.” The speaker is not strong enough to handle the state of affairs, but God is. The psalmist trusts in God, who moves all creation toward shalom.

It is fitting that we read this psalm in the Easter season. Even as the writer experiences grave difficulty, a subtle message of confidence and reliance on God is clear. We find comfort and hope in the psalmist’s words.

Questions

1. Have you faced a difficult time when you surrendered in trust to God?
2. When life is at its worst, how is God present?
3. Which pleas to God for help were answered the way you wanted them to be? When have they not been answered the way you wanted? How do you explain God’s steadfast love in both circumstances?

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 230, “Come to Me, O Weary Traveler”

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.*
*Light the peace candle.*

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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

Materials: basket of medium-size rocks with joy, hope, love, or peace written on them in permanent marker

What are some things we can say about a rock? How would we describe it? (solid, hard to break, strong, you can carry it so it’s always with you)

The writer of Psalm 31 calls God “my rock.” How is God like a rock? (God is strong and always with us.)

What are some other things we can say God is like? God is like: light, love, friend, (encourage children to complete the sentence).

Today we have rocks with joy, hope, peace, and love written on them. You each may choose a rock. Pass the basket around the group so everyone receives a rock. The rocks are reminders that God is strong and always with us. God is our rock of joy, hope, love, and peace.

Have the children pass out rocks. Watch to ensure each person receives one.