

Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year B

Focus: Ordinary Time

Scripture: Mark 7:24–37 NRSV

Gathering

Welcome

Prayer for Peace

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

Creator God,

We call on your presence, knowing you are already with us,
assured our cry to you is not unheard.

We ask you to bless us, knowing you have blessed us many times over,
and yet we do not feel we ask in vain.

We yearn for you to strengthen our faith—
and our faith is stronger even as we speak.

We praise you for your grace and are forgiven
even as we sing “Glory to God.”

We cry to you for a peace that passes understanding,
and yet we begin to understand, even as we weep.

We grasp the humble hem of Christ’s robe to dry our eyes,
knowing your love spills in our salty tears.

We respond by inviting others to commune in peace,
knowing you have prepared a place for them at the table.

—Lu Mountenay

Spiritual Practice

Meditating on God's Name

Materials: paper, pens, or pencils

Read:

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'"

—Exodus 3:14 NRSV

We will enter a period of meditation that includes hearing some of God's names, listening for new understandings of God's nature and names, and praying God's names together as a community.

As names for God slowly are read aloud, listen prayerfully and write the names that speak to you or catch your attention.

Holy One
Loving Parent
Healing Presence
Source of joy
Ancient One
Awesome God
Creator God
Father of lights
Compassionate One
Loving Spirit
Gracious Creator
Great Spirit
Grandfather/Grandmother
Great "I Am"
Beloved Friend
First Breath
Giver of life
Gentle Shepherd
Mother/Father God
Creator of beauty
My Rock

We now will pray silently. Spend a few minutes reflecting on how God's nature has been made known to you. Listen for new names and descriptors for God. Write down names for God that surface during your meditation.

Observe three minutes of silence.

Invite participants to read aloud names for God that emerged during the meditation time.

When sharing is finished, close with "Amen."

Sharing Around the Table

Mark 7:24-37 NRSV

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

This scripture relates two stories of healing and restoration. Traveling to Tyre, Jesus crosses the border from Jewish lands into Gentile territory—home to the historic oppressors of the Jews. Here he encounters the Syrophenician woman.

We are shocked by Jesus' harsh response to the woman's pleas for help. We are not comfortable with this compassionless Jesus. He calls the woman a dog, but the woman absorbs the insult and continues to make her case.

Until this exchange Jesus understands his mission as being for his own people. But by crossing a border and engaging in an unexpected encounter, Jesus is opened to new understandings of his mission.

Jesus then opens the ears of the deaf man. In the first century, physical disability often was viewed as a result of sin. Disabled people were excluded from most social and religious institutions. By healing the deaf man Jesus also restores the man's relationship with the community.

Questions

1. Have you ever been in a foreign place, out of your comfort zone? What does it feel like to be an outsider?
2. When have you been so focused on a task that you missed the opportunity for relationship and healing right in front of you?
3. When have you needed to be healed so you could serve others more effectively?

Sending

Generosity Statement

“Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f).

We receive God’s grace and generosity. 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:

Generous God, Be with each of us as we manage our time, treasure, talent, and witness. May we use all our resources in ways that express our desire to bring blessings of healing and peace into the world. May we focus our giving on your purposes, and may our hearts be aligned with your heart. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 5, “Bring Many Names”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

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

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Communion Statement

We come together to share in the Lord's Supper "as a visible witness of loving Christian fellowship and shared remembrance of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection" (Doctrine and Covenants 164:4a).

All committed followers of Christ are invited to partake, but no one should feel pressured to receive the emblems.

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):

515, "In These Moments We Remember"

516, "Coming Together for Wine and for Bread"

521, "Let Us Break Bread Together"

525, "Small Is the Table"

528, "Eat This Bread"

Thoughts for Children

Materials: large ball of yarn

Use the yarn to fashion a small circle on the floor. The circle should be large enough for only two people to stand in it. Ask a child to stand in the circle with you.

Say: This is our circle. We like it here. It is a good place to be. Can any more people fit in our circle? (No!)

What shall we do? (Encourage responses. You may need to prompt children to get the response, "Make a bigger circle.")

Use the yarn to create a larger circle, big enough for half the people in your group.

Say: See how many people can fit now. Can everyone fit? (No!)

OK. Let's make a circle big enough for everyone.

Help the children create a circle large enough for everyone in the room.

Say: Sometimes we discover the circle we are in is too small for others. This can happen at school when we play only with certain friends, and someone is left out.

When we discover our circle is too small, what can we do?

Encourage responses for ways to enlarge our "circles:" (Invite others to play. Talk to new kids. Sit with someone new at lunch. Share toys.)

Affirm each answer and offer a short prayer to bless the circles we make each day so all are welcome.