

Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year B

Focus: Ordinary Time

Scripture: Mark 8:27–38 NRSV

Gathering

Welcome

Prayer for Peace

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

O God, Creator of the universe and Giver of life,

Often in the hustle and bustle of activities we overlook your gracious concern for each of us. In your love, continue to forgive our negligence, we pray.

Help us all to realize the greatness of our heritage and the task before us to carry on the message of your mission of peace. With that whispered voice of counsel and direction from you, we will have the strength, courage, and knowledge necessary for this time and place as did those who came before us. In our more thoughtful and responsive moments it is our desire to help make possible a more peaceful society and loving environment.

The wonderful world you have created and permitted us to enjoy does not always provide the peace and safety that you envisioned. This, we know, is a result of our not fully accepting your counsel and fulfilling your desires for your creation. However, Lord, in all of this we continue to see, sense, and recognize your love for us individually and collectively. For this we are grateful.

May we have your presence, helping us purge our hearts of apathy and replacing it with a desire for peace and unity in this, your world. We offer our thanks and ask your guidance in the name of the great Peacemaker, Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Donald Lents, adapted

Spiritual Practice

Unity

Unity in Diversity is an Enduring Principle that expresses the diverse nature of the church and the commitment to live our common Christian discipleship as one community. We develop relationships that cross borders, cultures, traditions, and language. As we read in Roman 12:15, we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Think about the past year.

- When have you rejoiced? Who rejoiced with you?
- When did you weep? Who wept with you?

Spend a moment in silent prayer thanking God for those who rejoiced and wept with you.

Again, think about the past year.

- Who shared their joy with you, and you rejoiced with them?
- Who shared their burden with you, and you wept with them?

Spend a moment in silent prayer, thanking God for the opportunity to experience joy and sorrow in unity with others.

Invite any who wish to share reflections on the spiritual practice of unity.

Sharing Around the Table

Mark 8:27–38 NRSV

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

The exchange between Jesus and his disciples, especially Peter, addresses the question of who Jesus was. His stern order for them to not tell anyone about him was a signal that Jesus didn’t want to be identified with what people of that day understood about the nature of “the

Messiah.” Jesus was radically different than what many expected the Messiah to be. In Jesus’ day, that person was expected to be a powerful political or military leader. For the disciples to hear Jesus talk about his own rejection, suffering, and death was disturbing and confusing.

Peter’s reaction shows the extent of the disciples’ discomfort. He rebukes, or chastises Jesus. But unexpectedly, Jesus then rebukes Peter, even calling him Satan. Jesus explains that by focusing on human rather than divine understandings, the disciples could not understand what was going to take place and its deeper meaning and impact. Jesus doesn’t want the disciples proclaiming him as the Messiah when they do not fully understand what that means.

Jesus then makes clear that to follow him requires putting the welfare of others before one’s personal welfare (denying oneself), facing the real challenges of discipleship such as being persecuted for standing up to power or speaking against injustice (taking up the cross), and living the ministry and message of Jesus (following him).

Questions

1. After reading these verses, why would anyone want to follow Jesus?
2. When have you experienced denying yourself and bearing a “cross” as a disciple of Jesus? How did that feel?
3. What does this text mean within the context of your culture?

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 335, “Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather”

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: dove, heart, candle, star, cross.

Explain that you have several items that are symbols, which help us understand more about what it means to follow Jesus.

Hold up one item at a time. Ask what that symbol might mean to disciples.

Dove: peace, Holy Spirit

Heart: love, care for others

Candle: hope, Jesus is light

Star: Jesus' birth, the three Wise Men

Bread: Jesus is bread of life, Communion, feeding the hungry (loaves and fishes)

Hold up the cross last.

Cross: Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus lives in us, we try to live like Jesus

Affirm all the responses.

Have small crosses for the children to give to each person in the congregation.

Say: These small crosses can remind us that we want to follow Jesus and share God's love, joy, hope, and peace.