Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year C

Good Friday

Scripture: John 18:1—19:42 NRSV

Gathering
Welcome

On Good Friday we remember the crucifixion of Jesus. It is a time of somber reflection. Traditionally in sacred spaces, sanctuaries, and chapels, the room and altar are stripped bare. The absence of flowers, symbols, and banners speaks to the reflective nature of observing Good Friday.

Prayer for Peace

Share the following instructions aloud for today’s silent Prayer for Peace: In this time of darkness and confusion let us wait in silence as we silently unite our prayers for peace. I will ring the chime and light the candle of peace to signal when our prayer begins. We will hold silence together for one minute. At the end of that silence, I will ring the chime, and together we will say, “Amen.”

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle.
Wait one minute in silence.
Ring a bell or chime one time.
As a group, respond aloud: Amen.

Spiritual Practice
Prayer of Compassion

Read the following aloud:
Many religious traditions teach the importance of naming our losses and our sorrows. When we suppress our sorrow it can intensify and literally make our bodies ill. In the Christian tradition, Good Friday represents the day Jesus died on the cross. His body literally was battered and bleeding. One gospel writer records Jesus crying out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46 NRSV).

When we recognize and name Jesus’ pain we are connecting not only to his suffering, but to ours and others’. How many times have we cried out in a similar way? It is the suffering that makes the resurrection such an incredible story. Life and death, peace and suffering are parts of the paradox of life.
The name Good Friday comes from this concept. Joy is so sweet because of the bitterness we have tasted in the suffering. When our hearts are broken open and we are able to name our pain, we develop compassion for others who suffer. Through compassion we are able to appreciate the new life that emerges as resurrection overcomes death.

Give the following instructions: I will read aloud the words to a prayer one sentence at a time. Listen carefully for the first four words of each sentence. I will pause at the end of the sentence, and you will respond aloud, saying together those words. For example the first four words of the first sentence are, “God, open our eyes.” After I read the whole sentence you will all say aloud together, “God, open our eyes.”

As we prepare to pray, let’s focus and take a few deep, cleansing breaths in and out.

(Silently lead the group in a few deep, cleansing breaths.)

Read the following prayer aloud, pausing as indicated.

God, Open our eyes that we may see the suffering of those around us.
God, Open our eyes.
Pause for 10 seconds of silence.

God, Open our ears that we may hear the stories of those oppressed among us.
God, Open our ears.
Pause for 10 seconds of silence.

God, Open our hearts that we may fill with compassion and love for all.
God, Open our hearts.
Pause for 10 seconds of silence.

Amen.

Time to Reflect

One of Community of Christ’s five Mission Initiatives is Abolish Poverty, End Suffering. How is God opening you to see, hear, and love? Why is it important for us to see, hear, and name suffering?

Sharing Around the Table
John 18:1—19:42 NRSV

Note: Today’s reading is very lengthy. Consider reading the scripture aloud using different readers for each paragraph, allowing time to hear the story as it unfolds as a whole.

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus replied, “I am
he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.” This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.” Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.” When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” Jesus answered, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

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Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

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When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.” Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an
inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

“They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

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had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

The Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus’ passion from the time of his arrest through his death and burial. Many details in the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are absent in John. The overall theme John conveys is that Jesus has full control in his life and death. John’s Christ does not writhe in agony. He does not struggle in Gethsemane or cry out on the cross. He embraces death as God’s will and a way to return to God in victory.

Jesus causes those arresting him to step back and fall to the ground (John 18:6). He reinterprets questions during trial. He denies Pilate’s claim to power over him (19:11). The Gospel writer of John emphasizes that Jesus embraced death of his own accord, without human help.

During the trial, Jewish leaders force Pilate to pronounce the death sentence on Jesus, but they do not escape the irony of the inscription Pilate orders prepared and placed on the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Jesus’ sovereignty is proclaimed publicly even in the face of the chief priests who continue to demand his execution.

John details the ensuing events, careful to cite Psalm 22:18, communicating the message that in Jesus prophecy is fulfilled. Soldiers, Jewish leaders, friends, followers, and his mother gather at the foot of Jesus’ cross. This assortment of diverse people foreshadows those who will become a new family or community, following in the way of Jesus and caring for one another.

Jesus’ life, ministry, and proclamation of the kingdom, along with the prayer language in Psalm 69:21 about thirst, are summed up in the poignant words Jesus utters in John 18:11, “Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?” Jesus willingly drinks the cup and continues to thirst and drink until he has completed all that is required of him. “Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (19:30b). According to John’s account, even in death Jesus is in charge. No one takes his spirit from him. He alone gives it to God.

From first to last, John’s Jesus is the mover and controller of present and future. Jesus was victor, triumphant over pain and death, fulfilling his appointed role of Messiah, which he himself orchestrated to the end.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus proclaimed and modeled the kingdom of God, a kingdom of grace and compassion for all. He could have avoided death. All he needed to do was deny the kingdom and go with the social order of the day. Instead, he set his face boldly toward Jerusalem, and continued his actions of kingdom living even when threatened with execution. Christ died for the cause of the kingdom he proclaimed.

Questions

1. How do you see Christ’s inclusion of all people in the group gathered at his cross? How does this speak to us as disciples today?
2. How is walking the way to the cross with Jesus on Good Friday important to our understanding and celebration of Easter?
3. How is God inviting us to respond to the continued call to bring about God’s peaceable kingdom today?
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.

The offering prayer is adapted for Lent from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God of light and shadow, We share resources so others may know the presence of your Son. May these offerings 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 456, “‘Tis Midnight and on Olive’s Brow”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
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**Spiritual Practice**

**Prayer of Compassion**

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*God, Open our eyes.*

*Pause for 10 seconds of silence.*

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Amen.

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and continued his actions of kingdom living even when threatened with execution. Christ died for the cause of the kingdom he proclaimed.

Questions

1. How do you see Christ’s inclusion of all people in the group gathered at his cross? How does this speak to us as disciples today?
2. How is walking the way to the cross with Jesus on Good Friday important to our understanding and celebration of Easter?
3. How is God inviting us to respond to the continued call to bring about God’s peaceable kingdom today?
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.

The offering prayer is adapted for Lent from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God of light and shadow, We share resources so others may know the presence of your Son. May these offerings bring joy, hope, love, and peace into the lives of others that they might experience your mercy and grace. Amen.
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.

During this Holy Week as we share in Communion may we “always remember, the way of suffering love that leads to the cross also leads to resurrection and everlasting life in Christ’s eternal community of oneness and peace. Trust in this promise” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:6c).

In preparation let’s sing from Community of Christ Sings 527, “Bread of the World.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: small table, bright cloth, flowers in a vase, a heart or other symbol, a Bible.
Cover the table with the cloth and place all the objects on the table.
Say: Look at this pretty table. It looks so nice. It’s a lovely place for us to look during our time together.

What do the items on the table mean to you? (Allow time for the children to respond.)

Today is Good Friday. What does good mean? (Allow time for responses.)

Good Friday is the day we remember that Jesus died on a cross. This doesn’t sound good, in the same way that we just talked about the word good. But when we talk about Good Friday we are using the word good because it reminds us that the day Jesus died on the cross is not the end of the story of Jesus. We know that on the Sunday after Good Friday we will celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead and lives again in our hearts.

The time between Good Friday and Sunday is the time we wait for that to happen. While we wait, we take away all the pretty things that we look at during our gatherings, like the things on the table. This is one way to help us remember the darkness of how it felt on the day Jesus died, the day we call Good Friday.

Ask the children to help you remove the objects and cloth from the table.

Now the table is bare, and we will keep it like this until Easter morning. When we look at the bare table we remember that we are waiting for the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning.

Close with a short prayer:

Thank you God, for this time of waiting. We remember Jesus and await the joy and hope of Easter morning. Amen.

Thank the children for participating.