Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Ordinary Time, Proper 9

Scripture: Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30 NRSV

Gathering
Welcome

Ordinary Time runs from Pentecost to Advent. This part of the Christian calendar is without major festivals or holy days. During Ordinary Time we focus on our discipleship as individuals and a faith community.

Prayer for Peace

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

Most gracious Creator,

We come this day seeking wisdom and the peace that only you can give. We are overwhelmed by images that portray anything but peace—thousands of faraway men, women, and children trudging on dusty roads and sleeping in train stations; people like us, weary beyond anything we have known, crying from hunger, frustration, and grief. All because life in their country of origin has become intolerable.

The nations where they seek to settle also fear for jobs lost to newcomers, competition for living space, and a change in what it means to be Hungarian, or German, or Austrian. The problem is not theirs alone, for we hear the same concerns where we live. So often, it is the voice of fear and misgiving.

Our politicians rant and compete for our favor, casting fearful images of how dreadful life will be if we fail to choose their leadership. We shake our heads and wonder how it came to be this way. Yet, in some ways, it always has been this way. Every age and generation has had its fears, its complex decisions to make, its stubborn failure to work together. And we don’t know where to turn.

Yet we do. You have promised us a peace that passes all understanding when we seek your wisdom and truly listen to the still, small voice within us. We know we cannot turn a blind eye to the world’s agonies. We must take a stand wherever we can for justice,
for compassion. We must plant seeds of hope and grow deeds of blessing in our own communities.

Remove the fear from our hearts and teach us to listen to your voice as we form opinions, try to respond justly, and act rightly. Wherever we live, may we see you in others. Show us how to share in positive ways and not spread negativity, anger, and fear.

We ask for your blessing of peace and holy perception within us that we may embrace a world in need. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

—Cheryll Shaft Peterman (adapted)

Spiritual Practice
Prayer for Peace

Read the following to the group:

For today’s Enduring Principle we are focusing on the Pursuit of Peace (Shalom). Shalom for Community of Christ is defined as, “Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore shalom to creation.” By naming our Prayer for Peace for loved ones, the world, countries, and even those we disagree with, we are focusing our hearts on relationship and reconciliation.

Read the following prayer for peace by St Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

Amen.

Read the prayer again, having the group say each line after you say it.

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

Amen.

Invite group members to share about the hope they have for peace and reconciliation in their lives. Close with the following prayer:

Peace be to this house, peace be to all relationships, peace be to all the world. Amen.
Sharing Around the Table
Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30 NRSV

“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

...At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus tells the people that God keeps reaching out to them by sending different kinds of messengers, and they have not been well received. John was called a recluse. Jesus spends time with people, and still they complain that he should have picked different people. Jesus was misinterpreted and ridiculed because his message countered cultural norms.

Jesus then thanks God for those who have received his message, those who are willing to give all for the kingdom of God.

Jesus invites the people to “Come to me.” Jesus specifically addresses those who are overworked and carrying heavy loads. In the crowd would be people who were poor, yoked by the conditions of political and religious oppression. Jesus invites them to be yoked to him and find relief and rest.

The scripture today reminds us of Jesus’ humanness as he expresses frustration at people’s lack of understanding and then grace as he welcomes people to come to him.

Questions

1. How does the message of Jesus differ from the messages of your culture or social group?
2. What part of Jesus’ message is hardest for you to hear?
3. How are you weary and in need of rest?

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 our discipleship, As we navigate our world of debt and consumerism, help us to save wisely, spend responsibly, and give generously. In these ways may we prepare for the future and create a better tomorrow for our families, friends, the mission of Christ, and the world. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 230, “Come to Me, O Weary Traveler”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on the Group

- Communion
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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

Most gracious Creator,

We come this day seeking wisdom and the peace that only you can give. We are overwhelmed by images that portray anything but peace—thousands of faraway men, women, and children trudging on dusty roads and sleeping in train stations; people like us, weary beyond anything we have known, crying from hunger, frustration, and grief. All because life in their country of origin has become intolerable.

The nations where they seek to settle also fear for jobs lost to newcomers, competition for living space, and a change in what it means to be Hungarian, or German, or Austrian. The problem is not theirs alone, for we hear the same concerns where we live. So often, it is the voice of fear and misgiving.

Our politicians rant and compete for our favor, casting fearful images of how dreadful life will be if we fail to choose their leadership. We shake our heads and wonder how it came to be this way. Yet, in some ways, it always has been this way. Every age and generation has had its fears, its complex decisions to make, its stubborn failure to work together. And we don’t know where to turn.

Yet we do. You have promised us a peace that passes all understanding when we seek your wisdom and truly listen to the still, small voice within us. We know we cannot turn a blind eye to the world’s agonies. We must take a stand wherever we can for justice, for compassion. We must plant seeds of hope and grow deeds of blessing in our own communities.

Remove the fear from our hearts and teach us to listen to your voice as we form opinions, try to respond justly, and act rightly. Wherever we live, may we see you in others. Show us how to share in positive ways and not spread negativity, anger, and fear.

We ask for your blessing of peace and holy perception within us that we may embrace a world in need. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

—Cheryll Shaft Peterman (adapted)
Spiritual Practice
Prayer for Peace

Read the following to the group:
For today’s Enduring Principle we are focusing on the Pursuit of Peace (Shalom). Shalom for Community of Christ is defined as, “Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore shalom to creation.” By naming our Prayer for Peace for loved ones, the world, countries, and even those we disagree with, we are focusing our hearts on relationship and reconciliation.

Read the following prayer for peace by St Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
Amen.

Read the prayer again, having the group say each line after you say it.

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
Amen.

Invite group members to share about the hope they have for peace and reconciliation in their lives. Close with the following prayer:

Peace be to this house, peace be to all relationships, peace be to all the world. Amen.
Sharing Around the Table
Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30 NRSV

“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

...At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus tells the people that God keeps reaching out to them by sending different kinds of messengers, and they have not been well received. John was called a recluse. Jesus spends time with people, and still they complain that he should have picked different people. Jesus was misinterpreted and ridiculed because his message countered cultural norms.

Jesus then thanks God for those who have received his message, those who are willing to give all for the kingdom of God.

Jesus invites the people to “Come to me.” Jesus specifically addresses those who are overworked and carrying heavy loads. In the crowd would be people who were poor, yoked by the conditions of political and religious oppression. Jesus invites them to be yoked to him and find relief and rest.

The scripture today reminds us of Jesus’ humanness as he expresses frustration at people’s lack of understanding and then grace as he welcomes people to come to him.

Questions

1. How does the message of Jesus differ from the messages of your culture or social group?
2. What part of Jesus’ message is hardest for you to hear?
3. How are you weary and in need of rest?
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 our discipleship, As we navigate our world of debt and consumerism, help us to save wisely, spend responsibly, and give generously. In these ways may we prepare for the future and create a better tomorrow for our families, friends, the mission of Christ, and the world. Amen.
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.

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: two reusable grocery bags, multiple cans of food

Begin by putting a few cans of food in the bag.
Say: Today we are talking about burdens. I have a few cans of food in this bag. Is it a heavy burden or a light burden? Allow children to lift the bag to determine if it is heavy or light.
Add several more cans. Again ask, is this a heavy burden or light?
Finally, fill the bag with cans of food. Let the children try to lift the bag. Ask if it is heavy or light?

Say: When we have a heavy burden, we can ask for help, or we can give part of the burden away.
Can we give away some of the burden (the canned food) in this bag? To whom? Friends, family, maybe a food bank to feed the hungry?
Take some cans out and place them in the second bag.

Say: In this example, our bag was heavy with canned food. Sometimes our burdens are not things we carry on the outside but are things we carry on the inside. Sometimes we carry heavy burdens of sadness, worry, shame, or anger. When we try to carry these kinds of burdens for a long time, we become emotionally exhausted.

We can give our inside burdens to Jesus. We can ask Jesus to help carry these heavy burdens for us. This can help free us of our inside burdens and again be joyful and loving.

Thank the children for participating.