

# Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

## Year A

**Focus: Ordinary Time, Proper 10**

**Scripture: Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23 NRSV**

## 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.*

Our dear heavenly Creator, we praise you and recognize you as the life and light of our spirit. We thank you for your loving presence, and for all the blessings you have given us. We join with many others who are praying for and seeking peace in our world. We know confusion, anxiety, injustice, hate, and violence are causing so much suffering in your lovely creation. We ask a special blessing on all those who work to relieve that suffering. We ask a blessing on the leaders of nations. Grant them wisdom and patience as they decide. Help them to work in harmony as they strive to find ways to deal with the many difficult problems of living together in our complex world. Soften the hearts of those who use violence to settle disputes.

May we keep before us the vision of your kingdom of peace. We ask this in the name of the Prince of Peace, even your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

—Dora Wahl (adapted)

## Spiritual Practice

### Unity

Read the following to the group:

Our Enduring Principle focus this week is on Unity in Diversity. Not one person on this Earth is exactly like another person. We each are shaped by our culture, genetics, upbringing, family, experiences, beliefs, and more. One thing we all have in common is that we all are divinely made. Unity in Diversity is respecting the differences while honoring the Divine in all voices.

Read the following to the group:

But God has so arranged the body...that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

—1 Corinthians 12:24–26 NRSV

Read the following to the group and invite people to share reflections after each question:  
Think back over the past week. Who showed you compassion during a time when you felt sad or were suffering? Who rejoiced with you in the good things that happened for you?

Who endured suffering this week? How were you able to share their burden with them? Who rejoiced this week, and how did you celebrate with them?

Close the practice with a short prayer of blessing and gratitude for Unity in Diversity.

## **Sharing Around the Table**

**Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23 NRSV**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

“...Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

When Jesus tells parables, it causes us to rethink what it means to be part of God’s kingdom. The kingdom is never what we expect; there is always an element of surprise.

By the end of Matthew, chapter 13, Jesus is rejected in his own hometown. Matthew’s telling of this parable could explain why some people respond to the message of the gospel, and others do not. Or, it might answer the question: “What are the right conditions to share the gospel message?”

The sower can be identified as teacher, preacher, Jesus, or God. In fact, the sower is anyone who shares the good news. The seed in this parable refers to the gospel message. The yield becomes disciples who hear and allow the seed (word of God) to grow in their lives. Soil and the right conditions are required for the “seed” to grow. The parable describes four kinds of soil: hardened, shallow, thorny, and good. The soil differences remind the church that there are ideal conditions for growing disciples. Ideal conditions allow disciples to gain proper nourishment, roots, and the ability to persevere through hardship.

Matthew’s Gospel also describes the reality of the many obstacles faced by early Christians. That reality included persecution, anxiety, and a desire for riches.

The end of the parable describes God’s miraculous yield. A good harvest in ancient times could be as much as four to 10 times what was sown. Considering the lack of soil preparation and all the obstacles, it is surprising there was any yield at all! And that may be the whole point of the parable: God provides an extravagant, plentiful harvest beyond even our imagination.

## Questions

1. How has the condition of your life or “soil” been hardened, shallow, thorny, or good?
2. How has the message of love, joy, hope, and peace taken root in your life?
3. How have you been nurtured and cared for on your faith journey?

## 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 242, “When We Are Living”

### Closing Prayer

*Note: If you are using Thoughts for Children today, go outside with the children. Help them fill their pots with soil and plant some seeds to take home to remind them to grow in the love of Jesus.*

## **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.*

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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.

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: three small pots or cups—one with one-quarter inch of dirt, one filled with dirt, one filled with rocks; several empty pots (one for each child); potting soil; and seeds

Say: I have three small pots ready for us to plant seeds in.

Show the children the pot with rocks. Ask if the children think the seeds will grow in that pot? Why not?

Show the pot with one-quarter inch of dirt. Ask if the seeds will have enough dirt to grow roots? Why not?

Show the pot filled with dirt and ready for seeds. Ask if the children think the seeds will grow in this pot? Why?

Say: We are like the pots, and Jesus love plants seeds in us. If we are hard like the rocks, the love cannot grow. If the soil is too shallow (if we care only about ourselves) love cannot grow. But when we are like the pot full of dirt (willing to receive the teachings and message of Jesus), then love can grow and grow in Jesus' love.

After our gathering today, we will go outside, fill our pots with soil, and plant some seeds. You can take your pot home to remind you to grow in the love of Jesus.