Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Ordinary Time, Proper 11

Scripture: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 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.

Lord of language,
The word LOVE is present in VIOLENCE,
Just as love is present in the world of violence.
You have to search for it; it is not inherently apparent, but it lives within.
A scrambling of characters brings holiness; the dropping of letters brings peace.
Violence is anti-love,
anti-progress,
anti-diversity,
anti-Christ;
anti-your Word:
“As I have loved you...love one another” (John 13:34 NRSV).

God of all peoples, you’ve given commandments of peace to each community attacked as of late:

“O You Who Believe, Enter into Peace” (Holy Quran, 2:208),

ORDINARY TIME, Proper 11; Scripture: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 NRSV
and

“Peace, peace to the far and the near” (Isaiah 57:19).

The children of Abraham cry out from the four corners of the Earth, asking heart-wrenching questions:

“Why violence in my holy space?”

“Why us?”

“Where were you?”

“Where is PEACE?”

And just like the mystery of you—peace is everywhere, even in violence.

Introspectively we search, down and across for the meaning in our hearts to the simple Word given,

Shalom, Salaam,

the wholeness that is God, who dwells in each of us.

And when we finally find the Light in the dark within, whether it be a noun or a verb, we will use our tears and then our clumsy words to grant peace unto our brothers and sisters:

“Peace be with you.”

“Salaam alaikum.”

“Shalom aleichem.”

We outstretch our arms, embrace the others, and make them our own.

This is Peace.

May we find you.

Amen.

—Michael Wright

**Spiritual Practice**

**Holding in the Light**

Read the following to the group:

Our Enduring Principle focus this week is on Blessings of Community. We are taught to create communities of peace in our families, neighborhoods, congregations, nations, tribes, and
around the world. A spiritual practice that helps us feel connected to our communities is called holding in the light. It is a form of intercessory prayer/meditation adapted from the Quaker movement.

Share the following instructions:
We will stand in a circle. I will light the candle I hold. The rest of you will hold your hands in front of you as if you are helping me hold the light.
Allow time for the group to get situated.
Look at the candlelight and become aware of your own breathing. Begin to center yourself with breath prayer. Breathe in the word love. Breathe out the word light. Repeat three times.
Call to mind names of those loved ones, communities, or countries you wish to pray for as we hold the light. You may name them aloud or hold them silently in your heart.
Pause to allow time for people to share names aloud as they desire.
Now imagine those whom you have named being surrounded by light as bright as the candle. Continue breathing and meditating on the names of those you hold in the light in our circle.
After three minutes of silent meditation and holding in the light, share the following:
Offer a moment of gratitude for your loved ones, your communities, and this experience of holding in the light. Next time you see the light of a sunset or sunrise, may it remind you to pause and prayerfully hold someone you love in the light. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table
Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 NRSV

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

...Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire,
where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

This scripture, referred to as the parable of the weeds of the field, comes in two parts. The first is the actual parable, and the second is Jesus’ explanation of it to his disciples. The parts are connected to the parable of the sower and its explanation in Matthew 13:1–23 in two ways. One is the reference to sowing seeds in the field, and the other is the word found at the beginning and end of these two parables. The word is listen. Even the expression, “Let anyone with ears listen!” is common to both parables.

Jesus used parables, a well-understood method of illustration among Jewish teachers, to explain the kingdom of God in the future and the present. This is among the first parables in the Gospel of Matthew. In this one Jesus tells his followers he has an important message, and they need to listen carefully to these stories for hints at living in his kingdom.

The parable begins with an illustration of good seeds being sown in a field. While no one was watching, seeds from weeds were sown in with wheat. The servants of the field asked if they should go in and remove the weeds. They are told not to uproot the weeds because that would damage the good roots of the wheat. So the plants are allowed to live side by side until the harvest.

In Jesus’ explanation of the parable, he says it was the Son of Man who planted the seeds. He often referred to himself as the Son of Man to imply he was a dedicated follower of God, but also he was involved in presenting a vision of the kingdom.

Sowing the seeds is a kingdom-building activity. Everyone is given the seed to produce good wheat, but some choose not to accept. We call this “agency.” At some point, Jesus sends his angels to remove the causes of sinfulness, leaving the children of God to shine in the kingdom. The listener is cautioned again to listen.

These scriptures tell us there will be conflicting priorities in our lives. We choose the path before us. We cannot isolate ourselves from those who do not accept the instructions of Christ. We live among them. By our example we copy Christ and affirm his mission of invitation, compassion, and justice. We can invite them to become children of God by providing examples of the compassion and justice we learn from the life of Christ. We listen to instructions and respond as partners building God’s kingdom.

Listening is a lesson in stewardship. We are given the words of a loving God to respond in ministry with God’s people. We can choose to isolate ourselves, confident in the glow of God’s presence, or in generous service we can share ourselves to our true capacity. Today we are reminded to listen to the instructions that give us strength for the difficult journey ahead and share the message of hope with those waiting to be invited.

Questions
1. How do you navigate the conflicting priorities (wheat and chaff) of the world?
2. How have you been judged unfairly? How have you judged someone else unfairly?
3. How have you shared the message of Jesus with another person? What was the response?

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.
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 586, “The Summons”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on the Group

- Communion
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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—Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

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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 needed: bowl with two types of small candies (for example: Tootsie Rolls and Gummy Bears)

Ask the children: Which of these things is better?
Minty toothpaste or fruity toothpaste?
Cookies or broccoli?
Cats or dogs?
Books or movies?
Tootsie Rolls or Gummy Bears?

Sometimes it’s not really about what is better. It is just that we prefer what is more familiar. Sometimes we don’t like something just because it is different than we expected.

There is a story about a farmer who had a field of wheat that became full of weeds. The farm workers asked if they should pull out all the weeds. The farmer said no. Let the weeds grow alongside the wheat. The weeds could be taken care of later after the harvest.

Sometimes we label or judge others as “weeds.” We don’t want to let them into our life because they look, speak, or act differently than we do. The story of the farmer helps us look beyond differences and find ways to share with one another and appreciate our differences.

Jesus taught that all people are of worth to God. All are equal. All are loved. Let’s do our best to share the joy, hope, love, and peace of Jesus.

Share the Tootsie Rolls and Gummy Bears with the children and thank them for listening.