Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Ordinary Time, Proper 12

Scripture: Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52 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.

Holy God of peace and promise, As we become increasingly aware of the countless ways the Holy Spirit blesses our lives, we are won to moments of thanksgiving and praise.

We thank you for the gifts of love and divine presence. We praise you for the expressions of your majestic creativity as the universe is revealed more fully to us. We praise you for the seemingly limitless gifts of life-sustaining tenderness that create within us a wish to make our existence a hymn of devotion to you.

We thank you for the fleeting experiences of peace—individual, national, and international—that cause us to be aware of the relationships to which you call us. We praise you for nurturing within us a wish for that peace in our own lives and the life of our entire human race.

We praise you for the eternal promise of your vision to be expressed for all who seek to make your peace universal. We thank you for promises fulfilled and those yet to be realized by our world.

We recognize that such peace has not been the experience of many, and we admit our guilt in failing to seek peace diligently on their behalf. We thank you for the gift of forgiveness and for the divine invitation to repent and renew our commitment to you and your eternal principles of shalom.
Hear us, O God, and strengthen us as we seek to join in the search for peace with your Son, Jesus, the Prince of Peace in whose name we pray. Amen.

—Ken Simpson

**Spiritual Practice**

**Loving Kindness Blessing**

Read the following to the group.

Today’s Enduring Principle focus is Worth of All Persons. This principle states, “We seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth.” By practicing a loving kindness blessing, we remind ourselves of the worth of each individual.

For the blessing I will say a phrase, and you will repeat the words after me in your mind. Take a few moments to quiet yourself. If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes and simply become aware of your natural rhythm of breathing.

Allow the words of the meditation time to resonate in your heart and mind.

May I be blessed with loving kindness
May I be blessed with health.
May I be blessed with true happiness.
May I be blessed with peace.

Pause.

Think of someone who is beloved to you. Visualize the person as you pray. If you wish you may insert the person’s name into the prayer as you allow the words to silently rest in your heart and mind.

May my beloved be blessed with loving kindness
May my beloved be blessed with health.
May my beloved be blessed with true happiness.
May my beloved be blessed with peace.

Pause.

Now think of a close friend. Visualize the person as you pray

May my friend be blessed with loving kindness
May my friend be blessed with health.
May my friend be blessed with true happiness.
May my friend be blessed with peace.

Pause.

Think of someone with whom you are in conflict or has harmed you. Visualize this person. Breathe deeply and lovingly pray this blessing.

May the one who harmed me be blessed with loving kindness
May the one who harmed me be blessed with health.
May the one who harmed me be blessed with true happiness.
May the one who harmed me be blessed with peace.

Pause
Think of the Earth and all creation. Visualize all creation. Breathe out love in your blessing to all of creation.

May the Earth be blessed with loving kindness
May the Earth be blessed with health.
May the Earth be blessed with true happiness.
May the Earth be blessed with peace.

Pause
Invite people to share the thoughts, emotions, reflections, and images that emerged during this spiritual practice. Offer a brief prayer of thanks for all that was shared during this time of blessing.

Sharing Around the Table
Matthew 13: 31–33, 44–52 NRSV

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

...“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

The Gospel of Matthew is all about “growing as disciples.” The disciples of Jesus are learning what it means to be in relationship with God and with others in new ways. Jewish faith and tradition taught that God was never fully accessible to anyone but the chief priest. God’s
Ordinary Time, Proper 12; Scripture: Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52 NRSV

Kingdom was elsewhere, and the temple only allowed a glimpse of what was possible. Many entered the temple for worship and blessing, but God’s direct presence remained elusive.

For many reasons, countless people could not take part in the prescribed temple rituals and practices. For these people, even the smallest connection with God was only a hope. As we learn in this passage of scripture, Jesus began to share a new and different message: God’s presence is available for all! The kingdom of God is present now and for all of God’s creation.

What do the disciples of Jesus need to do to access God in this new way? According to the parable of the mustard seed, they simply must have the smallest of faith. Jesus tells his disciples the smallest of faith—like the smallest of seeds—can grow into a solid foundation for themselves and others. The mustard tree offers a safe haven for birds, and the kingdom of God offers the same for all of God’s creation.

This new and life-changing understanding of God’s enduring presence is expressed in the three parables Jesus shares with his disciples. Jesus uses three common people—farmer, merchant, and fisherman—to express the intense difference of this new understanding. The first two find something unexpected and are willing to give everything they have to keep it.

The third reminds us that no part of God’s creation will be outside the kingdom, and all people, regardless of whether we view them as worthy or not, are included in the kingdom of God.

When the disciples begin to understand God is present and available for all, their lives are radically changed.

Questions

1. How have you found respite in God’s enduring presence?
2. How have you engaged in radical behavior in response to God’s call?
3. How have you realized your faith has grown in a new and unexpected way?

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 387, “Bring Forth the Kingdom”
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.*

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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: several fruits or vegetable with visible seeds (e.g., cucumber, tomato, apple, kiwi), small cutting board, paring knife, paper, pen or pencil

Slice the vegetables and point out the seeds to the children. Describe how small the seeds are, yet each can grow into a large plant.

Say: God’s love is like those seeds. When we offer loving kindness to others it spreads to more and more people. Every day, we can do small things that can grow into bigger things. If I smile at you, you smile at someone else, then they smile, and soon everyone is smiling!

What small things can you do to help God’s love grow and grow? List the children’s answers. Encourage adults to share responses, too.

When all have shared, point to the list and say: Look at all the small things we can do. Each small thing may seem like a tiny seed, but each one can make a big difference in someone’s life.

Offer a short prayer asking God’s blessing on the small things we can do that will share God’s love.