Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Ordinary Time Proper 15

Scripture: Genesis 45:1–15 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 as a faith community.

Prayer for Peace

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

Creator God, how many ways can we pray for peace? Each day we raise our voices here in this quiet space. We pray for a specific place or many places. We remember a particular group and all humankind, aware even as we pray, that everyone, everywhere, yearns for peace.

Each day our prayer is different yet always the same. We know the selfishness, greed, inequity, and abuse of power that work against peace are always present and always strong. Thus, our prayer each day rises to you with new passion and urgency, because the need for peace is an ever-present ache that daily reminds us of our need for your healing, peace-giving love.

We pray this day for a peace made possible by fair and just leaders, enlightened citizens, a sound economy, plentiful food, and effective health care. Indeed, we pray for all that you wish for your creation that is denied to so many by wicked injustice and cruel circumstance.

God of all the Earth, forgive our own actions and wishes that, in whatever way, contribute to strife, inequality, and wrong. Make us more compassionate and more mindful of our duties while strengthening our resolve to do what we can do to establish your peace throughout the Earth.

In the name of him who daily reminds us of your peace, even Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

—Wallace B. Smith
Spiritual Practice
Receiving with Gratitude

Today we are focusing on the Enduring Principle of Grace and Generosity. The first thing we do in this life is receive. Our first breath is a gift. It is a gift that is given freely. The spiritual practice for today is a breath prayer. During the prayer we will use words as we breathe in and words as we breathe out. Today we will breathe in the words receive life and breathe out the words thank you.

Slowly read the following instructions:
Sit with relaxed posture and close your eyes. We will spend three minutes in breath prayer.
Breathe in a regular, natural rhythm. As you breathe in, silently say “receive life.” As you exhale, silently respond with “thank you.”
Breathe in and out, focusing on what you are breathing in and what you are exhaling.
Watch the time. Urge participants to continue the breath prayer for the full three minutes.
When the time is up, ask these questions in a short group discussion: What is one thing you are grateful for in this moment? How do you feel about receiving?
After the discussion share the following prayer:
Thank you, God, for another day. Thank you for the opportunity to connect with others, to receive and to give to one another. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table
Genesis 45:1–15 NRSV

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth
that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.’ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Today’s text is the climax of the story of Joseph. Jealousy and hatred led Joseph’s brothers to kidnap him and sell him as a slave. He was taken to Egypt, and there he found favor with Pharaoh, who appointed him to a position of power, second only to Pharaoh himself.

A widespread famine covered the land. To survive, Joseph’s father told the brothers to travel to Egypt to buy food. Joseph was responsible for giving out food that was in the holdings of Pharaoh. When the brothers arrived Joseph recognized them, but they didn’t recognize him. Before disclosing his identity and expressing forgiveness, Joseph manipulated his brothers. He set the brothers up, making it appear they had stolen money and Joseph’s silver cup. He also included the possibility of Benjamin becoming a slave in Egypt. Joseph then disclosed his identity and extended grace and forgiveness to his brothers.

Forgiveness is not carried out through manipulation. Reconciliation does not take place through retribution or by causing another person to grovel. Those tactics create distrust in relationships and always will be a barrier to sincere forgiveness. God does not manipulate us or expect us to grovel to receive forgiveness. Instead, God generously extends forgiveness and grace to all.

This story confirms that even the most difficult of life’s circumstances can be transformed through the Holy Spirit. God did not cause the brothers to sin, nor did God impose the famine to bring about blessings. Rather, amid trying circumstances, we learn to recognize God’s presence. Even in the darkness of poor choices, broken relationships, or times of crisis, the Spirit plants seeds of renewed hope, healing, and restoration.

Questions
1. Have you ever found it difficult to forgive when you have been wronged?
2. When have you experienced God’s generous forgiveness and grace? How did you respond?
3. How might the sincere offer of forgiveness bring healing to the one who was hurt and the one who caused the hurt?

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 this way 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.*
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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: feathers (enough for everyone to have one), rock (It might be helpful to have more than one, so multiple kids can hold the rock at one time.)

Say: When Joseph saw his brothers again, he had every right to be angry. They had done some terrible things to him. Instead, he chose to forgive them and repair the relationship he had with each of them.

Do you think that was easy or hard? Why? Affirm all answers.

Why do you think Joseph chose to forgive even though it was hard? Affirm all answers.

Hold a feather in one hand and a rock in the other.

Say: What do you know about these objects? Affirm all answers. Let them touch and hold the objects.

Say: What do you think will happen when I drop both objects at the same time. Allow responses before showing them what happens.

The rock dropped quickly, and the feather floated down. When we don’t forgive, we might feel heavy like the rock because we are holding onto hurt and anger. When we forgive, we are able to let go of the things that hurt us, and we are light like the feather. Forgiveness is not always easy. God can help us forgive just like he helped Joseph to forgive!

Ask the kids to help you pass out feathers to each person in attendance (adults and kids). Invite participants to use the feather as a tool for meditation as you pray. Offer a prayer for all present that they might be able to forgive those that have wronged them and that their hearts and minds might be relieved of the burden of holding onto grudges.