Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Ordinary Time Proper 16

Scripture: Exodus 1:8—2:10 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.

There are so many ways we divide ourselves from one another: politics, theology, economics, and culture, and these are only a few of the many. It seems we can manage to be in conflict about nearly everything.

Yet, there also are so many ways we are drawn together: the compassionate response of thousands of individuals to hurricanes; the coming together of neighbors and friends in response to a bombing.

Help us to choose and practice drawing together. Help us to not be paralyzed by the divisive.

Help us to seek you when we are faced with difficult questions.

Help us to see the value and efforts of others who serve in your behalf, especially from those who are not like us.

Help us remember through Communion that we are the body of Christ...your hands and feet; your heart and mind...that we may be about your peace.

—Charles Curry
Spiritual Practice

Body Prayer

Read the following:
Today we are focusing on the Enduring Principle of Sacredness of Creation. Our bodies are an amazing gift. Sometimes we don’t feel fully connected to our bodies. Our bodies often know things before we allow our minds to think them. When we pray with the movement of our whole body, we can receive different insight than when we use our normal prayer stance.

Read the following: I will show you movements with some explanations. Then we will repeat the movements three times silently together.

We start with our hands in the prayer pose (hands pressed together in front of you). This centers us.

- We raise our arms high. This opens us to the all-encompassing love of God.
- We put our hands on our hearts. This reminds us to listen to our voice within.
- We open our hands in front of our bodies. This offers our love to others.
- We lift our hands to the sky. This reminds us to open to all.
- We lower our hands and place them on our heart. This helps us gather and bring all to our heart.

- We bring our hands back to prayer pose. This brings us back to stillness and peace.
Now, let us move through these motions three times in silent prayer.
Repeat the movements three times. Bow to one another and say, “Namaste” (I bow to you).

Sharing Around the Table

Exodus 1:8—2:10 NRSV

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because
the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

The Israelites, while living in Egypt, thrived. But today’s scripture begins with an announcement that a new king is taking the throne in Egypt. Pharaoh feels threatened by the large Hebrew population and takes brutal steps. He enslaves the Israelites to work on construction projects. He decrees that every Hebrew male child be killed at birth. When that is not successful, he commands that every Hebrew male baby be thrown into the Nile.

As is often the case in the Bible, God uses those who otherwise would be considered of little worth to overthrow the best efforts of those who are believed to be in power. Today’s text is a story filled with fearless and compassionate women, from the midwives to Moses’ mother and sister, to Pharaoh’s daughter.

The Hebrew midwives first thwart the Pharaoh’s efforts by not killing the Hebrew males at birth, claiming the Hebrew women are birthing children before they arrive. Then Moses’ mother and daughter find a way to save this male infant from death. Finally, it is the Pharaoh’s own daughter who saves Moses from the Nile and raises him in the safety of the Egyptian court. As Moses grows, we sense God’s faithfulness in preparing to answer the cries for justice voiced by those who are oppressed. The stage is now set for the larger Exodus story—the Israelites will defy the oppressive regime of the Pharaoh and be led away from captivity by one of their own.

In our modern environment, there has been much oppression, from the local schoolyard bully to racial and gender discrimination. As disciples we find ways to disrupt and overturn systems of injustice and oppression that are realities in our lives and our communities. We trust
in God’s faithfulness—not power-hungry humans—to propel us and creation toward freedom and hope.

Questions
1. How have you participated in a system of oppression or injustice?
2. What steps might we take to stop bullying, marginalization, and persecution of others?
3. How might God be working through events and people to bring justice today?

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 239, “A Mother Lined a Basket”

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: battery-operated tea lights for each participant to hold (optional, but might be a good idea for younger groups)

Say: In today’s scripture we learn the Egyptians treated the Israelites very unjustly. While people have gotten better at treating other people justly, there is still a lot of injustice in our world.

Holding in the light invites us to place a person or concern in the light of God’s Spirit. Today, we are going to pray for people who are treated unjustly.

If you don’t know anyone specifically who experiences injustice, that’s OK. You can pray for people who don’t have enough to eat, people who are separated from their families, or people who constantly are afraid because of violence. You also can pray for people in your life whom you would like to hold in the light. Maybe someone in your family is sick, or someone at school doesn’t have many friends. Those are good people to hold in the light, too.

If you are using tea lights, pass those out before you begin praying. Invite all present to participate.

Allow a picture to form in your mind of the person or concern you wish to pray for. See the person or concern being surrounded and held in God’s light. Feel or sense this healing light, even if you do not have an image of it. Open your heart to God’s love for the person and continue to hold the person in the light until you hear me say amen.

Wait 30 to 60 seconds to allow children time to think and pray. At the conclusion, say: “Amen.”