Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Ordinary Time Proper 17

Scripture: Exodus 3:1–15 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.*

Eternal Peacemaker, God of creation, you have trusted each of us with so much power and potential, and yet at times our vision falls short.

This day we seek to turn our hearts to you to plead for strength. We are seeking hearts filled with the desire for peace, hearts filled with the vision of the lamb and the lion being led by little children. Let our hearts be led to actions that will create a world where all will understand their worth as souls.

We seek for all persons to lay down their books of violence, switch off media that glorifies human suffering. We seek to establish a new place on the Earth you allow us to inhabit. We seek to enable all to live in harmony and curb the evil of climate change, which will lead to further poverty and destruction. We hope for more understanding from many who need to see peace in new ways. We ask for this vision in our hearts and minds. Amen.

—Gail Shurtleff

Spiritual Practice
Loving Kindness Blessing

Read the following to the group:

The Enduring Principle we are focusing on today is the 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 All Persons.

For our blessing I’ll say a phrase, and you may repeat the words in your mind. Now, take a few moments to quiet yourself. Close your eyes.

Read the following to the group: Give 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. You may insert the person’s name into the prayer in your 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 Mother Earth and all creation. Visualize all creation. Breathe out love in your blessing to all of creation.

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

Pause. Invite people to share their thoughts, emotions, images as they experienced this time of blessing.

Sharing Around the Table
Exodus 3:1–15 NRSV

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said,
“Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

These 15 verses of Exodus confirm a basic understanding of the relationship between the Israelites and God. God has compassion for their suffering. God journeys with them and calls leaders to release them from bondage and oppression. God promises to stay with them in their suffering and in their victories. The God of the Israelites is the awesome and indescribable divine existence of past, present, and future. Although Moses is the protagonist of the book of Exodus, these 15 verses focus on God’s nature and relationship with God’s people.

Like other significant figures in the Hebrew Bible, Moses finds his early life is one of struggle and an unlikely prelude to becoming a person of significance. Though Moses was the adopted son of an Egyptian princess, he lived in disparate worlds as a prince and as a son of slaves. By chapter 3, we find Moses living the life of a lowly shepherd, tending his father-in-law’s flock at Mount Horeb. He describes himself as “an alien residing in a foreign land.” This is because he was in self-exile for killing an Egyptian guard.

While on Mount Horeb, the “mountain of God,” Moses encounters God. God expresses compassion for the Israelites and calls Moses into action. Moses twice responds with serious doubts about filling this calling (in later verses he tries to decline three more times). But God answers Moses’ hesitations by assuring steadfast divine faithfulness.

Exodus 3 has important parallels for present-day people. Our lives may seem of minimal significance in the world. However, when we are willing to turn our attention to the Divine, we find that we, too, have important work to fulfill that will benefit the world. Even in our hesitation
(or in some cases, resistance) God assures us we do not journey alone because of God’s awesome, indescribable, steadfast faithfulness.

Questions

1. How has God’s unexpected presence caught your attention?
2. When have you felt ill-prepared to fulfill God’s call? How did God’s presence give you the courage or ability to fulfill that call?
3. How does God continue to assure you that you do not journey alone?

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 595, “While Moses Tended Jethro’s Sheep”

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**

Say: Today’s scripture story is one of many times in the Bible when God called someone by name and asked the person to do something. In this story, God spoke from a burning bush and called Moses to free the Israelites. Other times, God’s voice has come as a whisper in the night, a loud roaring wind, or through Jesus. Regardless of how God called, God knew each person he called and didn’t abandon them.

Do you think God knows your name? Affirm all answers.
Has God ever called you to do something? Affirm all answers.

Say: God knows each of us by name. In one Community of Christ hymn we are told that God has gifted each of us and calls us each by name. We also are told that God will not abandon us.

Turn to the person sitting next to you and say his or her name. (If you don’t know it, find out!) Pause to listen to everyone calling one another’s names. Pause.
Say: Today, listen for God’s call and be prepared to answer, “Here I am.”