Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Ordinary Time Proper 18

Scripture: Exodus 12:1–14 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, cleanse our hearts. Accept the confession of our flaws and failures and make us whole. Transform us, O God, into the people of peace and grace you created us to be.

Pause.

Redeeming God, bring to our awareness persons and relationships that are broken. Make us conscious of the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. Transform us for relationships of wholeness once again.

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Saving God, allow us to feel your love and concern for your children in communities around the world. We remember all nations. May we weep with your tears and act with compassion to heal those who are suffering.

Pause.

God of all creation, stir within us a deep connection with everything you have created. Make us aware of the sacred nature of all that surrounds us and lead us into deep reverence that cultivates nurturing actions.

Pause.
May these prayers of concern, compassion, and transformation for ourselves, others, all people, and the Earth lead us into a world shaped by your unconditional love, O God. Amen.

**Spiritual Practice**

**Dwelling in the Word**

Read the following to the group:

Today we are focusing on the Enduring Principle of Continuing Revelation. We will practice this with Dwelling in the Word.

I will read the following excerpt aloud. As you hear it, allow words, images, or phrases to come to your mind. Try not to focus on them. Let them rest in you. After a moment of silence, I will read the excerpt a second time. As you hear the words again, listen for how God’s Spirit is nudging you or catching your attention.

Read this excerpt from Exodus 3:13–15 NRSV:

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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.

Pause.

Read the passage a second time.

Pause.

Invite group members to share responses to these questions:

1. What words, phrases or images came to mind?
2. How is God’s Spirit nudging you?
3. How does Dwelling in the Word create continued revelation within you?

**Sharing Around the Table**

**Exodus 12:1–14 NRSV**

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat
it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you. You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance. In the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day, you shall eat unleavened bread. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether an alien or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down. You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. When you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this observance?’ you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” And the people bowed down and worshiped.

The Israelites went and did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron.

At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all
his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a
house without someone dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and
said, “Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the
Lord, as you said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a
blessing on me too!"

The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said,
“We shall all be dead.” So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their
kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. The Israelites had done as
Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for
clothing, and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that
they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians.

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on
foot, besides children. A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great
numbers, both flocks and herds. They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they
had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt
and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. At the end
of four hundred thirty years, on that very day, all the companies of the Lord went out
from the land of Egypt. That was for the Lord a night of vigil, to bring them out of the
land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the Lord by all the Israelites
throughout their generations.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance for the passover: no foreigner
shall eat of it, but any slave who has been purchased may eat of it after he has been
circumcised; no bound or hired servant may eat of it. It shall be eaten in one house; you
shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its
bones. The whole congregation of Israel shall celebrate it. If an alien who resides with
you wants to celebrate the passover to the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised; then
he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no
uncircumcised person shall eat of it; there shall be one law for the native and for the
alien who resides among you.

All the Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. That very day
the Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company.

In this long passage from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), we read the story of the
beginning of what is known in the Hebrew tradition as Passover. On the eve of their Exodus
from Egypt, each Hebrew household (or cluster of households) was to slaughter a lamb. Moses
told them to mark the top and sides of their doorframes with blood from the lamb (so the angel of
death would “pass over” their homes), and to eat the roast lamb with unleavened bread—such as
one might make when preparing to leave suddenly. Then, they were to burn the leftovers the next
morning. It was both a reminder that God provides enough for daily needs and a burnt offering of
thanks for God’s saving grace.
The Passover and liberation of the slaves from Egypt are foundational memories for the Hebrew faith and continue in modern Judaism. God commanded the people to remember and perform the festival of the Passover every spring “throughout your generations…as a perpetual ordinance.” In the Passover meal, people reenact the journey from the despair of slavery to the joy of freedom, from oppression to redemption. God’s saving act at this first Passover stands as a promise that God will save the people in the future.

As a Jew, Jesus observed Passover. In the gospels we read that after sharing the Passover meal with his disciples in the upper room the on the night before his crucifixion, Jesus used wine and bread as symbols of remembrance of his life and death. Participating in the sacrament of Communion reminds us that the offer of freedom and redemption is for us, as well as for all of God’s children.

Questions

1. How have you experienced freedom and redemption because of God’s faithful provision in your life?
2. If nothing is required of us to receive God’s grace, why might it be important for us to engage in sacraments such as Communion?
3. What aspects of Communion are most meaningful to you?

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 559, “Bless Now, O God, the Journey”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on the Group

- Communion
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Pause.

Redeeming God, bring to our awareness persons and relationships that are broken. Make us conscious of the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. Transform us for relationships of wholeness once again.

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Saving God, allow us to feel your love and concern for your children in communities around the world. We remember all nations. May we weep with your tears and act with compassion to heal those who are suffering.

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May these prayers of concern, compassion, and transformation for ourselves, others, all people, and the Earth lead us into a world shaped by your unconditional love, O God.

Amen.
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Pause.
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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: In the Old Testament, Passover marks the liberation, or freeing, of the Israelites, who were slaves in Egypt. In the New Testament, the Gospels present Jesus as the Passover meal when he shares the first Communion and gives of his own life to free us. The liberation that comes from Jesus is for all of creation, not just a select population. Just as God told the Israelites to continue to observe the festival of Passover, Jesus tells his followers to observe Communion in remembrance of him. We are doing that today by practicing Communion. In Community of Christ, the Communion table is open to all people.

In addition to observing Communion, we should respond to the message and ministry of Jesus by sharing his liberating message with all of creation. When we do this, we participate in the mission of Jesus Christ. Our Mission Initiatives remind us of some ways we can share Christ’s liberating truth.

Can you think of an example of how we can participate in these Mission Initiatives?

Affirm all answers.

• Invite People to Christ (invite friends and family to attend worship or other church events, share with others your experience with Jesus)
• Pursue Peace (learn conflict-resolution skills, participate in the Daily Prayer for Peace, choose not to fight)
• Develop Disciples to Serve (attend Sunday school, participate in spiritual practices)
• Experience Congregations in Mission (attend congregational events like potlucks and community activities, keep an eye and ear out for ways your congregation could be involved in helping the community)
• Abolish Poverty, End Suffering (contribute money to oblation, feed people at a homeless shelter)