Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Ordinary Time Proper 19

Scripture: Exodus 14:19–31 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.

Loving God, in the quiet of this holy place we hear the peace you intend for all of creation. Our thoughts can rise as our spirits rest. The hope in our hearts is refreshed by the richness of this fellowship.

Let there be peace on Earth.

Hear our prayer for peace for the nations of this world. May your peace fall on all the fighting factions that have forgotten your love is for all. Touch the hearts of the decision makers and power holders with humility and compassion. Rekindle the light of your peace where poverty and prejudice so often extinguish hope.

Let there be peace on Earth.

With all the gentleness we are learning, we hold up your people: the ones with illnesses that cloud the mind or weaken the body, the ones who are grieving, the ones who are struggling in fractured relationships or challenging circumstances. We uphold them all.

Let there be peace on Earth.

O God, do not let us be content with lifting our prayers. As we call on you, let us also dare to lift our voices, our hands, and our resources to your mission of peace.

Let there be peace on Earth, and let it begin with me.

Amen.

—Claudia Schooler
Spiritual Practice
Holy Listening

Read the following to the group:

The Enduring Principle we are focusing on today is All Are Called. We believe all people have unique gifts, and we receive opportunities in community to share our giftedness. By practicing Holy Listening, we can learn more about the gifts people share in community, how they feel called to serve, and how we can support one another in discipleship and ministry.

Read the following to the group:

Ask the person next to you to join you in conversation. Find a spot to get comfortable and face one another. You will take turns sharing what you see as your giftedness and how you feel called to share that giftedness with others. It can be anything: friendship, music, compassion, reading aloud, laughter, or tidying up. You each will have three minutes to share. During this time the listener will listen and nod but not comment. At the end of the three minutes, the listener may respond with this one sentence. “I noticed that…” Then switch places and repeat.

Read the following to the group: Before you start this exercise please repeat this prayer with me. “Help me be wholly present to this person.”

You may begin your conversation.

Start the timer. After three minutes let the listeners say a one-sentence response and then ask them to switch places.

Start the timer again.

When each person has shared, invite the group to share reflections on this spiritual practice.

Sharing Around the Table
Exodus 14:19–31 NRSV

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.” So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth.
As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

In Exodus 14 we find the Israelites running for their lives from the Egyptians and Pharaoh. There is a mixture of support for Moses and questioning of his leadership as he leads them from Egypt into the wilderness. Many became disgruntled and wondered if living as slaves might be easier than risking their lives for freedom.

Even amid their doubt, God was with the Israelites on their journey. God’s presence was as a pillar of cloud, leading and protecting them. Throughout this passage, God was present—acting, speaking, and saving. As at the time of creation, God brought light and separated the light from the dark. God divided the waters, creating dry land. God made space for new life.

This story of the Exodus from Egypt portrays the movement from slavery to freedom as a time of new creation.

We know that the road to freedom from those things that “pursue” (tempt) us and separate us from God is at times perilous. Where there is light, there also is darkness. But just as God was with the people of Israel, God also is with us. Sure, the Israelites had doubts, and they grumbled from time to time. They even considered turning back to what seemed like an easier path. But as they continued in faith, God also was faithful. God’s presence journeyed with them into a new future.

Questions
1. How have you been willing to live in “slavery” to something rather than face the “risks” of journeying toward the freedom of something new?
2. How have you been a faithful presence with someone struggling with sickness, despair, loneliness, or injustice?
3. Where is God creating light in the darkness, dividing the waters, and making a way on dry land for something new to be created in your life and the lives of others?

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 383, “Circle Round for Freedom”

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: It’s helpful to have a tablet or phone Internet connection.
Show the group a video of baby ducks jumping from the safety of their nests in the trees
to the ground below. Many videos are available on YouTube. These can be found by searching
“Baby ducks jumping from nests.” Select the one that works best for your group.

Or

Describe how baby ducks jump from the safety of their nest into the water.

Say: The ducklings must leave the comfort and security of their nests and risk a jump into
the unknown. As they leave the nest and learn to swim, each one begins an adventure.

Say: After the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, they began their journey to the
promised land. Just like the baby ducks had to leave the certainty of the nest, the Israelites had to
leave the certainty of their lives in Egypt to discover the freedom they were promised.

Sometimes following God can be scary and require us to venture into the unknown.
However, God promises to be with us our whole lives. Just like the Israelites, we have to be
brave as we follow God and trust that God will always be with us, even in hard and scary times.