Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Ordinary Time Proper 20

Scripture: Exodus 16:2–15 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 Intelligence, by the power of your Word you created everything, from the smallest particle to the largest galaxy, from the tiniest speck of life to the largest animal, from the smallest seed to the largest trees. We are in awe of your creative power. At the same time, we are humbled by our part in your creative process, from physical inventions to life itself.

Today we pray we may be creators and not destroyers. We have the opportunity to create goodwill or ill will between individuals and between nations. Inspire in us the desire to be creators of goodwill. Help us to prefer commonality over differences, compromise over stubbornness, justice over injustice, and peace over conflict. Forgive us when our creativity fails us, and we resort to anger and violence.

The peace of Christ is our home and our goal. We live in Christ’s peace even as we are challenged to live into Christ’s peace. Help us make the peace of Christ our greatest desire. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

—Steve Bolie

Spiritual Practice

Discernment through Contemplative Prayer

Read the following to the group:

Enduring Principles are a foundation of Community of Christ. Today we focus on the Enduring Principle of Responsible Choices.
We find stories in the scriptures of people reflecting on their history and seeing God’s hand in all of it. When we pause to discern God’s existence in our lives, we can sense the divine presence. Recognizing God’s presence can help us as we discern Responsible Choices in our lives. One way to help us discern is through contemplative prayer.

Read the following to the group:

Contemplative prayer is a method of meditation used by Christians to sit in silence with God. This prayer helps us experience God’s presence within us. When we become quiet and listen to our heart, we can discern where God is calling us.

Choose a word as a symbol of your intent to open yourself to God’s presence. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed and repeat your word slowly and silently. When you become aware of thoughts, physical sensations, or emotions, allow them to pass from your mind and return gently to your word.

We will continue this practice for three minutes.

Ring a chime to start the meditation.

After three minutes, ring a chime to end the meditation.

Read the following: Now we will sit in silence for three minutes. Notice what thoughts and images come into your awareness.

Ring a chime to end the silence.

Invite the group to share thoughts and reflections about this practice.

Sharing Around the Table
Exodus 16:2–15 NRSV

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?” And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.”

Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.’” And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the
morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.”

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

Today’s passage gives another example of how quickly the Israelites forgot God’s faithfulness to them and reminds us of how the same is true of us.

When the Israelites came to the shore of the Red Sea, the Egyptian soldiers were advancing on them. They cried out to the Lord in fear. After God delivered them from the Egyptians, a celebration of God’s goodness ensued. Then they came to Marah, where the water was bitter. Again the people complained, and again God provided. In this passage the people are hungry, and again they complain against Moses. But Moses makes it clear that their issue wasn’t with him; their complaint was against God.

As is the case in our present-day relationships (with God and others), trust does not come easily. Rather, it is the result of patterns and rhythms of consistency and faithfulness, like that which God shows to the Israelites. Time and again, God hears the cries of the people and provides for their needs—albeit, not in the ways they might hope for or expect (such as sending a fine flaky substance like frost on the ground rather than sending a wagon full of bread).

The rhythms of promise, provision, compassion, and faithfulness are present here and throughout the Exodus story. If we pay careful attention, we also will see they are present in our journey with God.

Questions

1. When has someone walked with you in ways that built trust, provided stability, or showed great compassion for you?
2. How might you walk with someone else to provide a compassionate, stable presence?
3. What rhythms and patterns (observances, sacraments, spiritual practices) do you incorporate in your life to deepen your relationship with God?

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 240, “Light Dawns on a Weary World”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on the Group

- Communion
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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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: individual bags of M&Ms or Skittles (Skittles are best if you have kids with allergies), two pieces of paper, one with the number 1 written on it and the other with the number 2, tape.

Before beginning your worship, tape the papers on opposite sides of your meeting space. Begin by playing Would You Rather. Children will stand in the center of the room until you read a “Would you rather…” question. Once the question has been read, children will go stand by number 1 or number 2, depending on which option they choose. The statements begin silly, but as play continues participants will be asked to choose between wants and needs.

Would You Rather Questions

- Would you rather 1—never eat a cupcake again, or 2—eat only cupcakes for the rest of your life?
- Would you rather 1—be able to drink only water and have it always be clean, or 2—be able to drink whatever you want but always have a bug in it?
- Would you rather 1—have unlimited access to all the music you want, or 2—any movie you want?

For older kids:

- Would you rather 1—lose all of your money and valuables, or 2—lose every picture you ever have taken?
- Would you rather 1—have the newest iPhone as soon as it was released for free but always be hungry, or 2—always have enough to eat but have only flip phones?
- Would you rather 1—get to meet any celebrity you wanted but have to live without shelter, or 2—have a safe home but be ignored by anyone famous?

Say: What was difficult about choosing between the options? Affirm all answers. What is the difference between a want and a need? Affirm all answers.

Say: In today’s scripture story, as the Israelites journeyed in the wilderness, they weren’t always comfortable and didn’t have everything they wanted. However, God continuously provided for their needs. The Israelites complained about their discomfort rather than being grateful for what they had. It is important for us to practice gratitude.

Open a small bag of Skittles or M&Ms onto a plate. Allow each child to pick one piece of candy. To eat the candy, they must share one thing they are grateful for that related to the color of their piece.

- Red: Name a PERSON you are grateful for.
- Blue: Name a PLACE you are grateful for.
- Green: Name a FOOD you are grateful for.
- Orange: Name a THING you are grateful for.
- Yellow: Name ANYTHING OF YOUR CHOICE you are grateful for.

Give each child a small bag of Skittles or M&Ms.