Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year B

Focus: First Sunday after Christmas

Scripture: Isaiah 61:10–62:3 NRSV

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle.

God of love, of peace, and of justice:

We live in a violent world, Lord. Wars between nations and tribes exist all over the world and it must trouble you deeply. We pray for a cessation of hostilities, that differences might be settled through negotiations, through getting to know and empathizing with “the other”—who we all too often demonize.

We have treated as less-than human beings of other religions, other races, other ethnic groups, other gender identification, other tribes. Women are still treated as property in much of the world, and far too often, still, in this country.

We are inspired by the model of Jesus, who saw all people as persons of worth, and by Joseph Smith, who echoed this message.

May we remember—from the teachings of Jesus, and of Gandhi, and of Dr. King, and of Nelson Mandela—that returning hatred for hatred, violence for violence, only escalates the existence of hatred and violence in the world. Let us respond to hate with love, to violence with non-violence. Help us work to create the peaceable kingdom, Lord.

We ask this in the name of the humble carpenter from Nazareth, whose life and courageous facing of death helped us see what kind of people you would have us be.

Amen.

—Bill Russell
Spiritual Practice
Praying Liturgical Prayer

Give each person a copy of the prayer. Invite the group to read the prayer aloud with you.

Nurturing God,
remembering the exile of the holy family
and Herod’s slaughter of the children,
we remember all who need our sustaining love. ...

Grant that all people may hear together the song of joy,
and find their homes in the garden of justice and hope,
that we may experience the fullness of life,
which is your will for all,
in the coming of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=102

Sharing Around the Table
Isaiah 61:10–62:3 NRSV

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest…” (Isaiah 62:1). Opinions differ on the speaker of this passage. Is it the voice of the prophet, the Messiah, or God? Whichever way you read it the message is clear: I will not give up on the hope of Zion.
Perhaps the ambiguity of voice permits a sense of mutual determination. There is an interdependent relationship between the prophet, the Messiah, God, and Jerusalem.

Prophetic writings often portray Jerusalem’s relationship with God as a marriage. This passage is no different. The bridegroom is putting on fine wedding apparel while the bride adorns herself with a jeweled tiara (perhaps a reference to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem). But wait! Do not let the wedding feast imagery distract you from this fact: This is the second marriage between God and Jerusalem.

Marriages can be difficult, and the relationship between God and Judah became strained during the exile. After what seemed like a generation of the silent treatment, God and Judah are now on the path towards reconciliation. And this restoration is a joyous occasion!

But marriage relationships at the time of this writing also represented a creative aspect described in this passage as the Earth bringing forth its shoots and a new garden springing up. More than reunion, this is revitalization and new life. Indeed, much of Judah’s former glory was restored following Judah’s return from exile. Under King Cyrus, the Jews were able to rebuild the temple and repair the destruction to their many cities.

Reading this passage on the first Sunday after Christmas day reminds us of God’s ultimate act of reconciliation through the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God’s desire for reconciliation with humankind. More than that, God seeks to revitalize us and bring about new life within us. But reconciliation can be a difficult journey that requires rebuilding and repairing what was destroyed. The work of rebuilding and reparation is the desire for Shalom—peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness—in our relationships and, by extension, our society.

As we celebrate the Christmas season, may we strive to bring about God’s redemptive work of Shalom by healing divisions and offering hope of new life to those who long for reconciliation.

Questions

1. Are there relationships in your life that have been strained, but have since been reconciled? How did reconciliation happen?
2. In what ways do you feel God’s desire for reconciliation? In what way is the reconciling work of rebuilding and repairing taking place within society?
3. What does it mean to you that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God’s desire for reconciliation?

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.

God of Love and Light,
In this season of hope, love, and joy, may the peace of your son Jesus be made real in the world. May our hearts, minds, hands, and resources be useful in the cause of
bringing your light where there is darkness and your love where there is despair, anger, fear, and suffering. May our offerings be used toward your purposes we pray.

Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

Community of Christ Sings 420, “Star-Child”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Amen.
Communion Statement

Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, was born on Christmas Day; leading the walk in the way of truth; showing us how to love and serve one another. In the birth of Jesus, we recognize God’s great love. In the sacramental act of sharing Communion, we remember the gift of Jesus Christ to our world.

As we celebrate and remember the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day, our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

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.

In preparation let’s sing hymn 527 from Community of Christ Sings, “Bread of the World.”
Thoughts for Children
Christmas Stars Keep Shining

Note: This activity is a continuation of last week (Christmas Day)
Materials: The little tree from last week with all the Advent stars

Say: Today is the first Sunday after Christmas.
Ask: Does this mean Christmas is over? [Most children will answer, “Yes.”] Would you be surprised if I said it is still Christmas?

Say: Well, the celebration of giving and receiving gifts may be over, but the season of Christmas is not over. Christmas lasts from Christmas day until Epiphany on January 6. That is 12 days. During this time, we continue to celebrate the gifts that Jesus brings into the world.
Ask: Does anyone remember what they are? [Joy, Hope, Love, Peace]

Say: Today, let’s show how these gifts can be shared with others. Let’s each take a star from the tree and give it to someone else. Be sure to look around and make sure everyone receives a star. As we give out the stars, let’s remember that all year long we can share the gifts of love, hope, joy, and peace.

[Make sure everyone gets a star and no one is left out.]