

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place an open bible and lighted candle at the center of your group. Place small bowls of orange slices, apple slices, or raisins on the table where group members can reach and eat. Or, if you are vacationing, sit around the campfire in the evening and reflect together.

LEADER: Wise Creator, we bring our weariness to the wellspring of your Word.

ALL: Your kin*dom come.

LEADER: We bring our burdens—disappointments in those for whom we had most hope, hurts from those we most love—and rest them here.

ALL: Your kin*dom come.

LEADER: Holy Wisdom, gracious and creative God, we bless our partnership with you in our world.

ALL: Your kin*dom come.

Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite National Park promises fields of flowers that bloom almost simultaneously in its short growing season at 10,000 feet. So prized are the High Sierra camps that the park service runs a lottery to give out the tent sleeping spaces.

Our climb to a High Sierra camp took all day. The socks and new hiking sneakers came

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY



off right away to ford a small stream, then putting socks and shoes back on wet feet took time. The dirt path beyond was soft through trees. Shortly boulders arose to climb, to wind around. Then the rocks became smaller but the path up steeper. At every twist a new vista came into sight. At every stop a new array of flowers surprised us. At a distance a waterfall spilled hundreds of feet down.

Near noon we leveled out and ate our peanut butter and jelly lunch. We walked the ridge higher, passing mountain lakes, crossing soft bogs, traversing long, flat granite outcroppings. The path threads relentlessly up, up, up through the pines.

The beauty imprints the mind as one walks, sits, and stops to breathe. The next day after surviving the descent I sat on the Tuolumne River bridge,

watching the clear water glide over the stones. The water, like my days, gurgled on around the bend; my spirit like the mountains soared free of here and now.

● What has wearied you most in the past year?

● What most rests and revives you?



GOSPEL

Jesus is Wisdom's prophet.

JESUS 1: I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

JESUS 2: Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble



in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11.25-30

Jesus is God's Wisdom.

The five verses that form Sunday's gospel conclude Matthew 11, a chapter in which Jesus responds to a question that John the Baptist asks as the chapter begins. John sends some of his disciples to Jesus, asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we wait for another?"

In response Jesus tells the messengers to report what they see and hear. He is referring to the healing and freeing actions he has done for people. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them.

Many people of his time see and hear Jesus' actions without finding in them God's vision of wholeness for humankind and social transformation for

people who are poor. For these witnesses, who Jesus is remains hidden.

Jesus' deeds echo the prophet Isaiah's promise to the exiled Israelites that they will see the glory of their God (Isaiah 35.5-6):

*God will come and save you.
Then the eyes of the blind
shall be opened, the ears
of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap
like a deer, and the tongue
of the speechless sing for joy.*

His deeds identify Jesus as Isaiah's promised messiah and connect him with Israel's history. The work Jesus begins and sends his disciples to imitate is a mission that we continue—healing human ills and brokenness, lifting up the poor. It calls for living the beatitudes.

● In whom do you see and hear Jesus' healing mission continuing?

● How do you participate in bringing about God's vision for the human race?

The Christology in Matthew 11 identifies Jesus both as the one anointed to bring good news to the broken and the poor, and as Wisdom, the one who was with God from the beginning in all things, the people-loving Spirit who found in Israel a people among whom to live. In Sunday's gospel Jesus speaks as Wisdom's prophet.

The wisdom writings in the Old Testament include Proverbs, Sirach, Ecclesiastes, and Wisdom. For Israel, wisdom begins in awe at God's gracious work in creation and envisions human harmony shaped out of wise, God-centered, Spirit-animated relationships among people.

Proverbs describes wisdom as a woman who is with God from the beginning—helping put the heavens in place and marking out the limits of the sea. Lady Wisdom is God's delight. She delights in the human race and seeks to instruct them as her children. All creation is Wisdom's house. She sets her table of bread and wine for the simple and foolish, inviting them to the way of insight (9.1-5).

Sunday's gospel draws on the intimate relationship between the Creator and

Wisdom to describe the relationship between Father and Son. No one knows the Father but the Son. Like Wisdom the Son seeks to reveal God and the goodness of creation to all—the way of insight.

Just as Wisdom invites the simple and those without sense to her table, Jesus invites the weary and burdened to come to him. As Wisdom’s messenger, Jesus welcomes the least to his table and his community. Jesus invites us all into his revelation of who God is.

Jesus is Wisdom’s prophet, who welcomes and refreshes the weary, burdened, and lowly. He incarnates and brings among the people God’s gracious goodness, God’s dream of shalom for humankind.

● **How have you experienced God’s awe-inspiring, gracious goodness in creation this summer? In people?**

● **What does the wisdom image add to who Jesus is?**

● **How do we set a table in our midst for the weary and burdened?**

Jesus entices the weary to come to him because his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. A yoke is a collar used to harness animals for plowing or pulling. In that sense, a yoke



symbolizes submission. But Jesus’ yoke lightens loads and gives peace. This is the sense in which many rabbis understood Torah or the law of God. It is a yoke that puts human relationships in right order and brings peace.

For Jews, Torah holds the way to find and worship God and to do right. Torah is the name for the first five books of the Bible, which include the ten commandments. Torah is about more than the 613 laws it contains. Torah is a sweet yoke.

Every autumn Jews celebrate the feast of Simchat Torah (*Simkat*), the day they finish reading the Torah in the synagogue services and begin over again

with Genesis 1. The Torah is divided into sections to read each Sabbath. It takes exactly one year to read the whole Torah.

On the eve of Simchat Torah all the Torah scrolls are taken from the ark and paraded around the synagogue. Children follow carrying miniature Torah scrolls and colorful banners and flags. People blow kisses to the Torah or touch it reverently when it passes by. People sing and dance with the Torah and each other.

Because Simchat Torah comes in the fall, some synagogues begin their religious education classes then. The rabbi and their teachers bless the children and give them a gift of a prayer book or bible. It is also traditional to give the children a sweet treat, so learning may be sweet.

Like Wisdom, Torah makes life sweet and harmonious. Like Wisdom and Torah, Jesus lightens, refreshes, and restores our spirits.

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● **Practice welcoming Sabbath. Walk a mile in the morning alone, early. Welcome the dawn, the hour of Jesus’ resurrection. Breathe. See wide. Explore the tiny. Listen to the birds. Imagine people from whom you feel estranged in the dawn light of Jesus’ new life and enduring love.**

The rest that Wisdom, Torah, and Jesus offer has its origins in Sabbath, the seventh day on which God rests and enjoys all that has come to be in the six days of creation.

Sabbath rest is a pause to appreciate God's gracious goodness in all that is. Rest acknowledges our need for restorative sleep and rejuvenating experiences. Rest is willingness to relax in the mystery of God as a swimmer floats in the buoyancy of water.

Rest is stopping to let indescribable beauty soak in. Rest frees imagination to sight heaven's edge on the horizon. Rest is existing in right relationship with all that is, acknowledging ourselves and all that is as gift, welcoming and blessing even the least among us.

● **Where do you find rest?**

● **How do you keep sabbath as a right relationship to God? As a right relationship to all God's creatures?**

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Jesus is the messiah of peace.

The prophet Zechariah speaks for God among the Israelites who returned from exile in Babylon to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, its temple, and its people as a religious community. These events happen around 520-515 B.C.

Two hundred years later Alexander the Great conquers the Middle East and Greek culture with its array of gods erodes Jewish religious practice. In this later era unknown writers add six chapters to the book of Zachariah's prophecies, among them Sunday's verses. These verses speak to people weary of war. They envision the messiah as a humble man of peace who rides into town on a donkey rather than as a warrior leader in a chariot.

This king spreads peace to the nations rather than conquer them. Christians identify this leader with Jesus. In fact, Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem echoes this vision of a leader of peace (Matthew 21.1-9).

A king comes in peace.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
He will cut off the chariot

from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace
to the nations; his dominion
shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River
to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah 9.9-10

● **To whom can you come in peace this week?**

PRAY

Conclude your time together by praying this old English prayer.

1. God, be in my head and in my understanding.

ALL: I am seeking you.

2. God, be in my eyes and in my looking.

ALL: I am seeking you.

3. God, be in my mouth and in my speaking.

ALL: I am seeking you.

4. God, be in my heart and in my thinking.

ALL: I am seeking you.

5. God, be in my end and at my departing.

**ALL: I am seeking you.
Be with me.**



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