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Worship and Application

A worship team and preacher may want to use the Lazarus Church series as an all church study and coordinate sermons in a way that deeply engages the church. The sessions could be used prior to a sermon as a way of preparation or after the sermon as a way of response and reinforcement. This study is intentionally created in ways that allow local leaders to pull together the “recipe” that best fits your context and the needs and opportunities present as you think about your “next steps.” You and your team will best know how the church responds to a *demanding call and time of change*. Just don’t soften the challenge so much as to make the steps too easy. Such steps may be good, natural stretches or may be so radical (after all, it’s not typical for a dead body to leave the grave!) that resurrection is the best description of a dead church dancing into new life! Keep this in mind as a Body of Christ movement.

Use the sermons and study in ways that confront the challenge/s, hear new life and abundant living in community from God, and build consensus and momentum. The intent is 1) to face the realities of church and community, and 2) to experience a resurrection as a congregation that is only possible with and through God. I think of this as fanning the flames of a movement in congregation and community. How do you:

- pull the congregation together in a time of divine opportunity and change?
- engage a majority of the church in a response to God that breaks through to new habits?
- help focus the congregation in worship, discipleship, prayer, and outreach as an act of repentance, prayer, and next steps?
- and move forward in more powerful ways as a congregation?

Such a series might work well during Easter season or Pentecost though it could work as well through Lent or during a mission or evangelism focus. Listening closely to God, and some wisdom about taking it a step at a time, is worth reiterating as we want to engage the challenge/s yet not explode the church. Of course, it may be that a church decides to die and not be resurrected. This, in and of itself, could be one response and allow everyone to accept and state the reality.

A preacher might pull a key scripture or thought from a session and use that as a focus in worship. Or, if the approach is to follow the lectionary, there are certain seasons and focus upon the

prophets, ministry of Jesus, or ministry of the church that the study lends itself well to the worship focus. The key in this might best be a missional/outreach approach to scriptural interpretation and emphasis upon both individual and congregational application of what it means to be a people who follow Jesus in the community. How does your church get beyond the personal/individual spirituality into a larger movement of God in your community? This offers an exciting response to worship that can serve as “homework” beyond the last hymn in the sanctuary and a practice of living out the faith and encouraging a positive adventure and momentum as a focus for the entire congregation.

This could also be an exciting time to intentionally craft worship- the themes, movement, and style- in ways that might focus primarily on the community. So much of what congregations do can be to build worship around our traditions, expectations, and preferences of the congregation that we can easily lose the sense of expressing the drama of salvation for our whole community. This could be a great time to explore and take some steps that will stretch toward invitation and engagement of the community. This would be much more than merely relying on people to come to the church (the old attractional model that may have had some success in a day when most of the community may have been oriented to church). If a church is eager to intentionally engage and invite neighbors who may be very different than the existing church and have different preferences of style, language, music, etc. how would you do that in your place? What does worship look like in a Lazarus Church in your community?

This approach might also give new emphasis, urgency, and power to the prayer life of individuals and church. The dynamics of change, community engagement, listening for God and to the community, and new life of a congregation all lend to a vital piety and an earnest need for a deepening prayer life. This integration of worship, prayer, outreach- mission and evangelism, discipleship, and the whole of a strong Methodist Christian approach to holiness offers just the right environment for the church to benefit from this study.

Lean into this with a future orientation of worship, prayer, and the deepening the experience and practice of being a church of the community and you are well on your way in expanding your missional engagement. Enjoy the adventure of becoming the church God and your neighbors most need today and tomorrow!