



Small Group Tools: FaithWalk

September 4-5, 2010

John 11:17-27; 38-44; Psalm 1

Community

TODAY'S THEME

Lazarus is dead; really dead. Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days, and yet resurrection life happens because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. We are dead in our sin, yet resurrection life happens for us, as well.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

We'd like our small group to clearly understand that Lazarus is really dead and Jesus brings him back to life. Lazarus receives a second chance at life, one more shot, a do-over. We want our small group participants to know that when the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ gets loose in their lives, they get another shot at more "I love yous," more "I'm sorrys," more "I'm listenings," more "I am fully living!"

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want our small group to act on the opportunity to live into the resurrected power of Jesus Christ by responding to three questions:

First, who needs to hear you say, "I love you"? Identify them and act on it. Second, who needs to hear you say, "I'm sorry"? Identify them and act on it. Third, who needs to hear you say, "I'm listening"? Identify them and act on it. In doing this, we live into the resurrected power of Christ among us.

INTRODUCTION: SECOND CHANCES

Print this cartoon and share it with the group as a starter point of information: <http://www.cartoonstock.com/cartoonview.asp?catref=aba0382>. Or you might want to share this video clip from The Princess Bride: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GrYNaaYSjs>. The clip, featuring Miracle Max, is called "He's Only Mostly Dead."

Lazarus is dead! Really dead. And he gets another chance at life.

ICEBREAKER What's the one thing you'd do over if you had the chance? Is there an area in your life you had once given up for "dead," but now has new life?

PRAY TOGETHER

God, just as Christ breathed new life into Lazarus, you breathe new life into each one of us. You call us out of the darkness of our tombs into the bright light of a resurrection morning. You give us new life again and again and again. We give you thanks and praise! Be with us as we open your word and experience the raising of Lazarus together. Teach us how to live into this resurrection life every day. Amen!

Content

CONTEXT

From about 30,000 feet, we see things in the Gospel of John that we'd never see up close. Through the first 10 chapters, John highlights the ways in which Jesus' ministry connects with the various institutions and festivals of Judaism and makes them interpretive vehicles for Jesus' self-revelation. For instance, in chapters 2-4, Jesus uses institutions of Judaism: a wedding at Cana (2:1-12); the temple in Jerusalem (2:13-25); a rabbi in Jerusalem (Nicodemus, in 3:1-21); and a well in Samaria (4:1-42). In chapters 5-10, Jesus uses the festivals of Judaism: Sabbath (5:1-47); Passover (6:1-71); Tabernacles (7:1-9:41) and Hanukkah (10:1-39).

John the Baptist's work frames the entire revelation of Jesus. The narrative began with the story of John the Baptist in 1:19, and now it ends on the same note in 10:42.

John 11 and 12 stand together, marking a new and significant step in the life and work of Jesus. Jesus now makes his final move to the region of Jerusalem, coming to the village of Bethany to tend to his friend Lazarus. In John 11, with the raising of Lazarus, we encounter the story of the most dramatic and provocative sign in the Gospel of John: Jesus is Lord and master of life and death, and proves it by bringing Lazarus back from the grave.

(Read John 11:17-27; 38-44.)

DISCUSSION Why is this miracle so important in establishing Jesus' identity? Why does this miracle get Jesus into so much trouble with the authorities?

The Lazarus story is about one man who Jesus rescues from the grave. But the story of Lazarus is also a parabolic story; it's a short story with a moral lesson. Even though Lazarus' name appears on the marquee, these verses tell us much more about Jesus, his power, and his upcoming experience in the grave, than it does about Lazarus.

DISCUSSION What do you think this story tells us about Jesus? What does it say about his power? What is he saying about the coming days of his life?

To help understand this deeper message, the story uses the double meanings we have seen in previous chapters. For instance, in 11:12 Jesus comments that Lazarus is asleep, and his followers take this literally: "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." But Jesus means death in its fullest sense. Ironically, death for Jesus is much like sleep, because Jesus knows Lazarus will be awakened. Death does not bear the same finality for Jesus as it does for every other person.

DISCUSSION Is death like sleep for us? In what way? In what ways is Jesus' death different than our death?

The story of the raising of Lazarus pulls together a number of strands that John has already put into place throughout the Book of Signs (chapters 2-12). The themes of light and life have been very important since chapter 5. The giving of life, or making alive, is an important ingredient in the discourse of John 5:19-47. Two times John states that those who are dead or in the graves, who hear Jesus' voice, will come out from the tomb (5:25, 27-28). John 6:54 expresses the climax of the discourse about Jesus as the Bread of Life by stating, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."

In John 7-9, the focus shifts to the theme of light. But the emphasis on life returns in chapter 10. John 10:10 says: "I have come that they might have life and have it in abundance." John 10:27-28 says: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them ... and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish."

The issues of eternal life and of hearing Jesus' voice are present in both chapter 5 and 10. It is interesting that Lazarus comes forth from the tomb when he hears Jesus' voice.

DISCUSSION Why is hearing the voice of Jesus so important? What kind of contrast might it have been for Lazarus to step from the darkness of the tomb into the light of midday? What do you think abundant life looks like?

GOING DEEPER: DEATH IN OUR SOCIETY

Metaphorically speaking, there are places in our lives that either seem to be or are, in fact, really dead. Hopes and dreams, jobs, marriages, goals, purposes, health, school, all of these things can seem dead-ended.

DISCUSSION What are some places in our current culture that can appear to be dead? What does it take to breathe new life into these places? How can we be part of the process of breathing new life into:

- Hopes
- Dreams
- Jobs
- Marriages
- Goals
- Purposes
- Health
- School

Application

LIVING INTO THE RESURRECTION REALITY

If today is the first day of your new life, your second chance, your one more shot, your do-over, how does that change the way you live, love, serve, think, work, and play? How will you live your life differently today?

Answer the questions in the "what do we want our small group to do" section on the previous page and act on your answers.

When we act on these things this week, we will begin to live into the resurrected power of Christ among us. The new life that God breathes into Lazarus, giving him his second chance at life, becomes the breath that we breathe here together.

PRAY TOGETHER

God, teach us how to fully live each day. Fill our hearts with thanksgiving, and help us to say more "I love yous." Teach us how to lay our pride aside and say more "I'm sorrys." Lead us into conversations where we can say more "I'm listenings." Breathe your resurrection life into every moment this day and every day. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Constant Dialogue

JOHN 11:41-42

"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe you sent me."

In this short verse, the whole of the Lazarus text finally makes sense. Jesus is in constant dialogue with God the Father, from the moment he hears about Lazarus' condition until this moment when he will call Lazarus back to life. We would expect this from Jesus, who is the Son of God. What we may not know is this: Jesus is modeling for us that God wants to be in constant fellowship with us, also. We are to pray and seek God in all circumstances. Like Jesus in this text, what God asks us to do may be counter to what the world is asking or seeking. At times, it will go against the tide of those around you, like it does throughout the Lazarus narrative. But God's voice is the ultimate voice that we are accountable to respond to in our lives. We can also know that God hears us, and we hear God.