

## SESSION THREE // Resurrection as Worship

Sara Miles, author and founder of The Food Pantry ministry, talks about the purpose of worship in raising the dead. If the resurrection is a reality that embraces the lives of all of God's people, then worship should not be a passive experience centered on only words and ideas, but it must also encompass a tangibility and reality that comes with human existence. In other words, we can begin to understand God more fully when we can dance with God and the all the saints.

**Watch the Film** *Raising the Dead with Sara Miles*

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/raising-the-dead>

### *Going Deeper*

1. Miles begins, "We do worship because we want people to actually have an experience of worship and not just talk about worship. And our point of our worship and the point of all the incredible icons that are in there is that we are making this stuff by hand." She continues, "We invite everybody to participate in worship because we believe God invites everybody to participate in God's restoring work."

How do churches often reinforce passivity in worship?

How is this different from worship at other church services? How does this kind of worship speak to their beliefs about the relationship between people and God?

2. Miles asks, "What is music for? What is the purpose of music?" She says, "We've made a conscious decision to run our worship aimed at the stranger, aimed at the person who has not been here before," and adds, "As soon as you walk in the door we invite you to be part of making it happen."

How does this conscious effort to include the stranger and including people into worship a reflection of the gospel?

3. Miles says, "The question is not 'what is worship,' but 'what it is for?' Worship is for transforming you. Worship is for raising the dead. Worship is for bringing ourselves into God's world with the rest of God's other people. Becoming a people when there was no people, becoming alive when there was death, that's what worship is for."

How does this purpose help churches move beyond worship style and taste?

4. Miles describes the liturgy of the service at St. Gregory of Nyssa. There are times of silence, broken by a sermon, whereby people participate “by sharing from their own experiences where that story has connected with their story” and “allowing the Spirit to talk through them.” Miles says, “We dance the final hymn around the altar and the saints dance above us. And the physicality of being jammed up to dance with other people singing and dancing with this entire world of saints going on and on. I understand I am a piece of a dance that is going on with Jesus at the lead of it. I don’t understand it in an abstract doctrinal way, I understand it physically.”

How does this type of liturgy help to bring people into the reality of the gospel and resurrection?

How can our understanding of God become more physical? In other words, how can churches move from a purely intellectual understanding of resurrection to something that is expressed in reality?

## **Reflection**

There is an early saying of the church that says, “the order of worship is the order of belief” (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). The worship of the church expresses what the church believes. This is why the early church changed the day of worship from the Sabbath, which started on Friday Evening, to Sunday, the day of Christ’s resurrection. For the early Christians, the ultimate event was not Good Friday, but Easter Sunday. It was a day when God defeated death and sin.

The church does many things, but central to all these things is the worship of God. Often worship is about style, organ or electric guitar, hymn books or projector screens, robes and stoles or t-shirts and jeans, but this does not get at what worship is really about. Worship is to express a reality; it is the naming of things both hidden and apparent, both here and not yet, both completed and unfulfilled. It brings to light the mystery that is in Christ, that Christ has come to set the captives free, bring sight to the blind, and healing to the sick.<sup>9</sup> Music and song, sermon and liturgy, prayers and Eucharist, should all be directed at this reality.

However, for many, the resurrection is not reality, but distant myth. Easter eggs and bunny rabbits seem more tangible than someone being raised from the dead, someone who can conquer the dead in our lives, in our relationships. Many of us who have not encountered

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 4:18

resurrection experiences in our lives might find it difficult to believe that there could be life on the other side of the tomb. However, worship is not only an individual experience between a person and God; it is an experience that takes place in community. The times when I come to see my life as an empty chasm of bones, others have spoken to those bones and helped me believe that there could be life.

Worship takes place in community because we are not raised individually, but collectively as people of faith. Jesus's own resurrection was not solely of his doing.<sup>10</sup> In other words, even in the life of the Trinity, the resurrection was not a private affair. The individualism of the West finds it important to see both our successes and our failures as a matter of self-determination. We are the captains of our ships. We choose our own fates. However, if we examine our lives closely, we will have to acknowledge the many people who have contributed to our success or failures as persons. It is not that we blame others for our failures, but we can acknowledge that we live and exist within a context of community.

In what ways can worship help you enter into a resurrected life? Perhaps it is finding those who can help you have faith, even when you have little faith. Finding the right family and community can be difficult, but when we have come to know people who can see life in the places we only see death we know we have arrived at the right place.

### *Further Reading*

Sara Miles, *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion* (Ballantine Books, 2008)  
---, *City of God: Faith in the Streets* (Jericho Books, 2014)

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<sup>10</sup> Several scriptural sources seek to describe the act of resurrection as being both by the act of Jesus (Jesus himself rose from the dead), and by both the Father and the Spirit.