

Come Alive: The Death of Sunday Worship—COVID Version

Practicing death and resurrection in the context of worship

The pandemic has caused the entire Christian Church to let go of our central spiritual practice—physically gathering to worship God on Sunday morning. Through what seems like an “eternal Lent” we have had to go of our normal ways, and grieve their loss. As Easter people, we know we can’t skip over the reality of death and loss (even though we would like to). Instead, we are called to journey through with hope trusting that God will bring new life. However, sometimes we seem to be more interested in just restoring what had rather than letting die what needs to die. If we dare to do this, our communities can emerge not resuscitated, but resurrected. As we return to our buildings again for gatherings, we have the opportunity (if we are open to it) to let Sunday worship die altogether—not the gathering for worship, but our tendency to worship what we do on Sunday itself!

This practice is an opportunity to reflect on what has died in worship and community life in the past year, to grieve, and to explore what new life God is bringing to your congregation. This exercise can be done alone, or with a group. Before you begin, create a holy space and time. Perhaps arrange some sacred objects on a table in the center of your group, light a candle, ring a bell, or some other way to mark the beginning and ending of this spiritual practice.

Step 1: Make a list of elements of community gathering and worship that have temporarily “died” this past year because of the pandemic.

Step 2: Circle the elements on your list that have been the hardest for you. Underline what has been hardest for your congregation.

Step 3: Take 2 minutes and imagine what it would be like if these parts of worship never came back. Let the grief of the death of those things wash over you. It may help to close your eyes.

Step 4: Was “worship of our Sunday gathering” on your list? What if we could never meet together in the way we used to? Grieve that possibility as well.

Step 5: Take a deep breath and remember these words of Jesus: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Step 6: Trusting in the promise of new life, ~~cross-out~~ the things on your list that you are willing to let die. Be courageous and cross out two more things that would be really hard to let go of (whether or not you plan to follow through). Say a prayer to commend these holy things to God.

Step 7: Make a list of all the new fruit you have seen in worship and gathering this year. What couldn’t you have imagined doing a year ago?

Step 8: Circle the elements that are most meaningful to you. Underline what is most meaningful to your congregation. Cross out new things that you also need to let die.

Step 9: Look over both lists, take a deep breath, and remember these words from the Apostle Paul: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

Step 10: Say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for all that has died and all that is (and will be) resurrected.

As you plan for gathering worship in the weeks and months ahead, come back to your lists. How might God be calling your congregation through death of Sunday worship into new life as the resurrected body of Christ?

What other areas of your ministry could benefit from applying this practice?