

# Worship Resources – *The Lazarus Effect*

## Propers:

*April 10, 2011 (Lent 5A)*

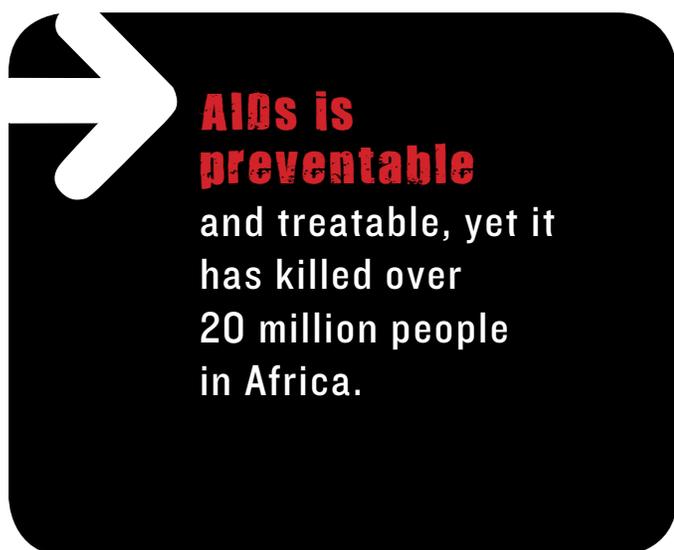
Ezekiel 37:1-14  
*Vision of the valley of dry bones*

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11  
*Life in the Spirit*

John 11:1-45  
*The raising of Lazarus*

These worship resources may also be used on Sundays other than April 11, 2011 when other Biblical readings are used. The texts appointed by the Revised Common Lectionary for the Sundays throughout the season of Easter are particularly appropriate because the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ pairs easily with the story of the raising of Lazarus. Because every Sunday of the church year is a celebration of Christ's resurrection, portions of these resources may be used on any Sunday or adapted for use other occasions like World AIDS Day (December 1).



## Worship Texts

*by the Rev. Christine Merkel-Nessel*

### Confession and Forgiveness

We begin the way in which we are baptized; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

Gracious God,  
we come before you weak and dying from the power of sin. Give us the strength of your Spirit so that we can confess our sin and live again as signs of your glory and love.

**Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

*Silence for reflection.*

God of resurrection,  
**we confess that we wrap ourselves in a shroud of sin by all those things that we have done and left undone. We stumble and turn from the light by the ways we treat our neighbors and in the ways we seek our own glory rather than yours. Have mercy on us, come to us, weep with us, then take away the burden of our guilt so that we may live as resurrected people, loving and serving you in Jesus' name.**  
**Amen.**

Beloved of God,  
through the power of Jesus' death and resurrection you are unbound from sin. In the name of Christ you are forgiven. Live in faith and believing.  
**Amen.**

### Call to Worship/Opening Litany

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

**Yes, Lord we believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.**

The grace and assurances of God, the deep love of Jesus Christ, and the unbinding power of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

## **Prayer of the Day for April 10, 2011 (Lent 5A)**

Almighty God,  
your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

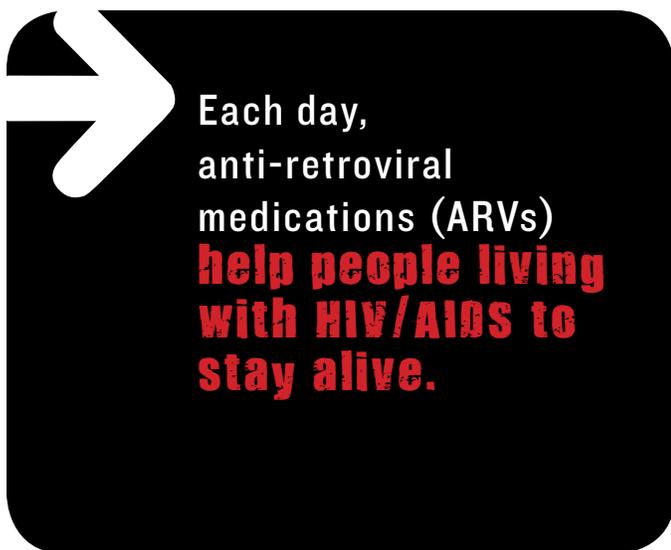
Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 28)

*If alternate Biblical texts are used, the appointed prayer of the day may be used.*

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Gathered together through Christ's death and resurrection let us pray.

*A brief silence is kept.*



For your church and all those who serve you;  
O God, you are our God,

**Of this we are positive.**

For the resources of your creation and our use  
of them; O God, you are our greatest gift.

**Of this we are positive.**

For those affected by natural disasters,  
drought and floods, earthquakes and fires;  
O God, you are almighty.

**Of this we are positive.**

For just governments, honest and compassionate  
leaders, and conscientious civil servants; O God,  
you are our protector.

**Of this we are positive.**

For peace in war-torn lands, broken relationships,  
and troubled minds; O God, you are our serenity.

**Of this we are positive.**

For economic stability and fair wages; for the  
jobless, and those who are enslaved; O God,  
you are our guardian.

**Of this we are positive.**

For scientists who work diligently to find treatments  
and cures for disease; O God, you are the giver of  
all knowledge.

**Of this we are positive.**

For orphans and widows, for parents who bury  
their children, for those who have no family; O  
God, you are our loving parent.

**Of this we are positive.**

For the health of every cell in our bodies,  
the well-being of our minds, and the openness of our  
hearts; O God, you are our healer and sustainer.

**Of this we are positive.**

For doctors and nurses and all those who care for  
the sick; O God, you are our physician.

**Of this we are positive.**

For education and awareness, for acceptance, un-

derstanding and love; O God, you are our teacher.

**Of this we are positive.**

For organizations and clinics that strive to relieve suffering; O God, you are our healing balm.

**Of this we are positive.**

For all those things that matter to us, cause us to worry, give us fear, and weigh us down;

O God you are our deliverer.

**Of this we are positive.**

For the dying, for those who surround them, and for those who now rest in death; O God, you are our comfort in all grief.

**Of this we are positive.**

For the hope of resurrection now and always;

O God, you are new life.

**Of this we are positive.**

For these things and whatever else you see that we need, we pray, in the name of the one who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ, our savior.

**Amen.**

## **Anointing**

When Jesus saw Martha, Mary, and those with them grieving the death of Lazarus he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He wept with them and they marveled at how much he loved

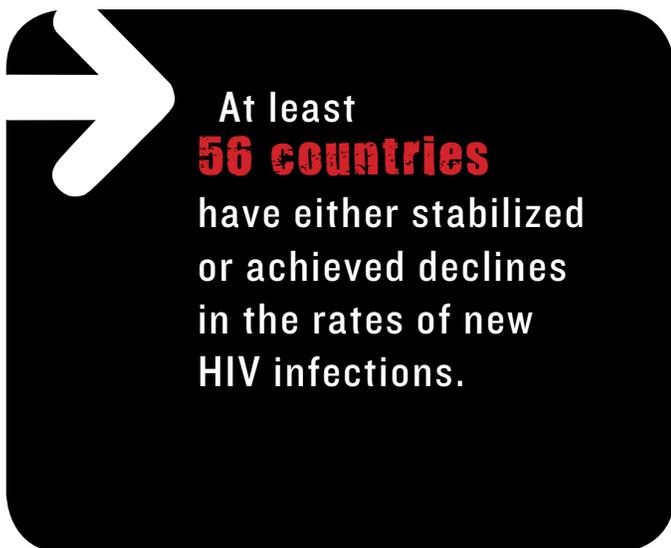
Lazarus. That love turned death into a sign of God's glory. Christ's love for us is just as deep as his love for Lazarus; it is that love that turned his death on the cross into our resurrection story.

As we remember all those whose lives have been lost to AIDS; all those who have lost mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons, uncles, aunts, cousins, partners and friends; and all those who have suffered from the stigma of a positive diagnosis; let us be marked as signs of Christ's victory over death so that we can live as reminders of resurrection and hope to all the world.

Those who wish to receive the sign of the cross in oil, approach. *The minister makes the sign of the cross on each person's forehead using these or similar words:* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit you have been marked by the cross of Christ to be a sign of resurrection and hope.

**Amen.**

As people return to their seats red ribbons may be distributed for them to wear.



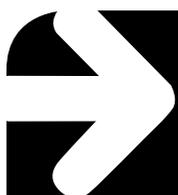
## Sermon Starters

By the Rev. Matthew Staniz, pastor of Temple Lutheran Church, Havertown, Pennsylvania

What does the message of Jesus have to say about the global HIV/AIDS Pandemic? As a people entrusted with the treasure of the Gospel, how will the church carry out our mission in a 21st century world where millions continue to die, especially among the poor, because of a disease that is both preventable and treatable? Clearly, the response must be more than a sermon. At the same time, faithful proclamation that connects the gospel of Jesus Christ to these critical questions is an absolute necessity. Thank you for offering your voice to this life-saving and kingdom-building campaign!

### **Resurrection: The Final Word and a New Beginning**

The entire gospel hinges on resurrection. It is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ that death is defeated forever. It also provides the starting point of a new reality. People with hope rooted in resurrection do God's work with our hands in order to participate in God's transformation of this world into the reign of God—a new reality shaped by God's grace. Because resurrection is both the promise we place our trust in and the reality that drives us to participate in God's mission for the sake of the world, it must always be present in both our proclamation and in the ministry we engage in together.



As the first and largest donor of the Global Fund, the U.S. is paving the way in the fight against AIDS. Currently the U.S. directly supports life-saving ARV treatment for **more than 3.2 million** men, women and children.

## **The HIV/AIDS Pandemic: Waiting to Die or Waiting to Live?**

Faced with the reality of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is critical that proclamation of the gospel include an intentional effort to increase awareness and inspire advocacy. Preaching must not shy away from both the facts about HIV/AIDS and the stories of lives impacted. Helpful resources are available at [www.ONE.org](http://www.ONE.org). It will not be difficult to inspire a compassionate emotional response, and perhaps even an effort to respond charitably as a congregation. The larger challenge is to move listeners to see compassion and charity as first steps in our ongoing work to accomplish justice for people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

It is through advocacy that compassion and charity are energized and justice becomes attainable. As churches have started demonstrating, organizing, petitioning, and even lobbying on issues surrounding the HIV/AIDS pandemic, governments have listened and acted. Public opinion has changed and new approaches to saving lives have become a reality. As a result, millions of lives have been saved. People are no longer waiting to die. At the same time, it is vital that we continue to speak and act. Millions more remain untreated. With new solutions available, they are not waiting to die, but waiting for the chance to live.

### **Some Thoughts for “Lazarus Sunday” (Lent 5A – April 10, 2011)**

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14) provides a model that resonates profoundly with the current HIV/AIDS pandemic among the world's poor. God leads Ezekiel into the valley and involves the prophet in the bringing of new life. The work begins and ends with God, but God insists that human action is included in the life-giving transformation of the world. Like Ezekiel surveying the dry bones of exiled Israel, today's believers also must remain compassionately aware of a generation of African people crying “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.” Such awareness participates in the fulfillment of God's will through the prophetic voice of faith speaking up in order to summon a life-giving

response from each of the four winds, which today might include faith communities, governments, businesses and individuals.

Psalm 130 could easily be heard today as a “psalm of Africa.” As in Ezekiel, the experience of Israel in exile is reflected in the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is heard in the opening lament, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord,” as well as in the joyful expectation of “I wait for you, O LORD; my soul waits; in your word is my hope.”

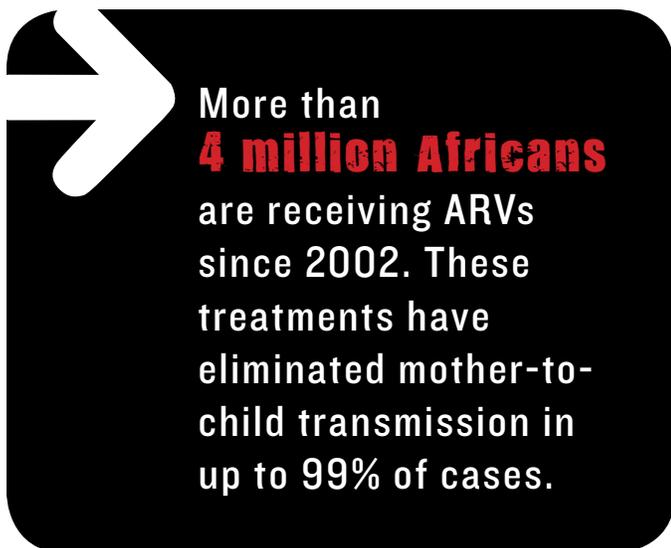
Paul’s contrast of flesh and Spirit in Romans 8:6–11 must not be mistaken for a spirituality that is divorced from our physical bodies or the experience of earthly life. Such spirituality would see no need to respond to actual physical suffering, including the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Instead, Paul proclaims a relationship in which God’s Spirit gives life to our mortal bodies.

The raising of Lazarus in John 11:1–45 provides the inspiration for the title of “The Lazarus Effect,” a documentary film about life-saving anti-retroviral (ARV) medications. Referring to Lazarus early in the passage, Jesus indicates, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Jesus later makes it clear that he knew Lazarus would die. The text is clear that Jesus was not dismissive or uninformed of the severity of Lazarus’

illness. Instead it indicates to us an opportunity to see the glory of God revealed through resurrection.

We must not, however, confuse resurrection’s victory over death with a more temporary rescue from death. Even though Lazarus received a miraculous opportunity to live again, he inevitably experienced physical death and was returned to his grave. As Jesus proclaims himself “the resurrection and the life,” he maintains the reality that physical death remains a part of resurrection living: “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” Resurrection’s victory is far greater than merely avoiding physical death.

As we strive to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, we are challenged to not be dismissive or uninformed. HIV/AIDS is undeniably fatal, yet both treatable and preventable. As people with hope rooted in resurrection, we are driven to change the reality of the world that we live in. Our calling is to create a new reality that is rooted in the hope we have found. Even as physical death remains inescapable, the reign of God is not content with any injustice that leads to deaths that can be prevented.



More than **4 million Africans** are receiving ARVs since 2002. These treatments have eliminated mother-to-child transmission in up to 99% of cases.