

A Funeral in Nicaragua

I have always struggled with the way we have given over our grieving process to the professionals...I have worked with many wonderful funeral directors whom I like very much. However the reality is that it has become a sterile ritual. The last funeral I did in Canada was for a family that wanted to put dirt on top of the urn and actually bury it themselves. When we got to the cemetery there was a hole but no dirt. We had to ask the cemetery staff to go and find some dirt.

Well this week I did the funeral for a very nice family. When you are notified that there has been a death you immediately go to the church and toll the bell. This gets people talking about who has died. Soon folks call me or more often drop by and ask, "When is the funeral"? Before the actual ceremony folks begin dropping in to visit. The body is in the main living area with eternal lights and flowers in plastic bags.... Then the worship itself starts at the house. The casket is always open and folks make their goodbyes. There is a short time of prayer, scripture and brief mediation. Then the casket is put in the back of the truck and we all walk together to the church. The minister and the family walk in front of the truck. I find this is a good time to have a nice visit with the family. It is physical exercise and it is hot. If you are not able to walk, you get in the truck. Then the full funeral takes place at the church. After the service we walk to the cemetery, which is a good twenty-minute walk. At the cemetery I do the short committal service and then the body is put into the crypt.

Then the crypt needs to be cemented closed. So we sing and sing and sing some more. We sing to the music of cement being mixed and the smell of cement. The shovel bangs against the wheelbarrow and slapping of the cement trowel keeps our attention as we watch the openings slowly close. Then when it is finished I do the blessing. People cry and hug and slowly make their way back to the street and the walk home.

This is real and it is dirty and visual. You can smell it and taste it. And you experience it in community because everyone comes. It is a community event. There is nothing sterile about this ritual. We could learn so much from this experience and perhaps grieve in a healthier manner. All of these people will be back in church on Sunday and no one will say oh I can't come to church because I have bad memories of my Husband (wife, friend etc) funeral. Life and death mix together here so easily. The belief in the resurrection permeates the funeral and the conversation. It would not occur to anyone to stay home from church because the funeral of his or her loved one prevents it.

A day in the life

Yours in Christ
Deborah and Donald