

Crafting my own Funeral

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I was asked by a long time friend to preach the Gospel at the Funeral Service for his wife. The Service was in an Episcopal Church, where I have preached many times. The Priest agreed. Needless to say, my old time Baptist preaching style is a wee bit more dynamic than what the folks present were used to. Most of them were Roman Catholic or Episcopalian. I was glad to do it and believe God annointed the message and its delivery. As usual, many people responded very favorably and said so to me afterward.

But also as usual, I was really troubled by what follwed the Message. The Liturgy was so flat, yes, "dead." The Gospel promises victory over death and the grave. It promises forgiveness and Salvation. A Funeral is a marvelous time to minister to hurting people with the offer of grace and mercy and hope that comes from the Gospel. I shared my confidence that our friend was now with the Lord, saved by grace. She had the blessed assurance that she was redeemed, not by her Baptism, but by the Blood of Jesus through faith alone.

None of this hope and faith came through the Prayer Book Liturgy or the rest of the Service. It all just kind of droned on, lifeless. This should be a time of Celebration! Nothing. My Message was followed by a very rote recital of the Apostles Creed and then the very perfunctory "Prayers of the people. Likewise, the Burial (Internment) was lifeless and routine. I have officiated at innumerable Funerals over 50 years. They were all personal. If anything should be personal, it is a funeral. I crafted each one with the deceased person in mind and in conjunction with the family. None were just read out of a Prayer Book (one size fits all).

I came home, rather disgusted, and set to work writing an outline for my own Funeral, complete with Testimonies and Hymns. I do not want the usual Prayer Book Service.