

Voices: Going to the funeral for Lent

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In 2005, Deirdre Sullivan wrote an essay for NPR's *This I Believe* series titled "[Always Go To The Funeral](#)." Her short piece was inspired by the words her dad instructed her when she was 16 and reluctantly preparing to attend the visitation hours for her fifth-grade teacher, who had unexpectedly passed away.

The essay was about the ways we should always do the "little things" that may not feel good in the moment but make a world of difference to someone else. She writes, "In going to funerals, I've come to believe that while I wait to make a grand heroic gesture, I should just stick to the small inconveniences that let me share in life's inevitable, occasional calamity."

For those Christians who observe Lent (as well as for those whose pastors have tricked them into it by instituting some form of "Six Weeks of _____ leading up to Easter"), we make a conscious choice to always, every year around this time, go to the funeral.

Ash Wednesday is, in fact, a sort of reminder-in-advance of our own funerals.

Dark days

Yet, unlike Sullivan's vision of sharing in "life's inevitable, occasional calamity," Lent is a choice to share in the inevitable, constant calamity of the human condition of having come from dust, and our eventual return to dust. This may be why so many Protestants have shunned Lent in the past.

We want the hope of resurrection without the toil of the wilderness and the

pain of the cross.

Can I be so bold as to suggest that our knowledge of what happens on Easter morning can sometimes serve to handicap our ability to fully experience what God wants us to experience in the dark days leading up to that glorious Sunday morning?

A long Friday

I attended more than the average amount of funerals as a child. Then, between 2005 and 2011, I buried three close friends, a mentor and my dad. I am entering the stage of life where there are far more funerals to attend than weddings, graduations and baptisms combined.

It seems a little macabre to rate funerals, but I'm going to do it anyway. The best funerals are the ones where the attendees don't try to pretend that a death has not occurred. The worst ones are those in which people try REAL hard not to be sad.

Lent is a time for us to be sad. It is the time for us to recognize that death has occurred, is occurring and will keep happening until the end. And it invites us to figure out how to live in this reality.

When a close friend died, someone told me these dark words: "The really bad thing about this is that it is just going to keep on happening. We are going to keep on burying each other until there's no one left." But they were also hopeful words because they were spoken by a pastor, a messenger of the good news, that death isn't all there is. He knew I believed the good part of the gospel but wanted to give me permission to embrace the bad news that came before the good news.

"It's Friday, but Sunday is coming!" you have likely heard. Which is true. Equally true is the declaration, "Sunday's coming, but right now it's Friday."

May we enter this long Friday going to the funeral, tending to broken and dying pieces within ourselves and our communities, naming the darkness and walking through the wilderness with Jesus.

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