**Accompany Them With Singing: The Christian Funeral – Thomas G. Long**

“Human death has never been simply a fact; it has always been a mysterious ocean summoning those left standing on the shore to stammer out convictions about life and to wonder what lies over the horizon.” (pg.3)

“A Christian funeral should not be a precious ceremony aimed at covering up the fact that someone is really dead and that the people who are around the dead person have to take care of the body. That is the honest-to-God truth of what is going on. When we care for the bodies of the dead we are not trying to hide an embarrassment behind a screen of piety; we are trying to do a human thing humanely.” (pg. 9)

Regarding the Sacredness of Human Life:

“Yes, some deaths are more peaceful than others, some are less painful than others, some can even be taken to b be blessings; but death itself is not holy. God is holy, and human holiness comes because God’s breath formed us in the very image and likeness of God. (pg.27)

When someone told the mother of a teenager dead from leukemia that “this is just a shell” she retorted, “I’ll tell you when it’s ‘just a shell,’ for now and until I tell you otherwise, she’s my daughter.”

“So to suggest in the early going of grief that the dead body is “just” anything rings as tinny as its attempt to minimalize as if we were to say that it was “just” a bad hair day when the girl went bald from chemotherapy. Or that our hope for heaven on her behalf was based on the belief that Christ raised “just” a body from the dead. What if, rather than crucifixion, he’d opted for suffering low self-esteem for the remission of sins? What if, rather than “just a shell,” he’d raised his personality, say, or The Idea of Himself? Do you think they’d have changed the calendar for that? Easter was a body and blood thing, no symbols, no euphemisms, no half measures.” (pg.35)

Different types of death:

The two essential forms of death are natural death (which we might call “small d death”) and Death as a mythic force, as the enemy of all that God wills for life (which we might call capital-D Death). The third form of death, added by the gospel, is the death of Christ. (pg 38)

As for history, along comes small-d death to kill us and to end our life and time and place. “The wind passes over it and it is gone.” As for eternity, along comes capital-D Death to sneer at our hopes, to take away our freedom, and to turn us into slaves paid only the wages of sin, which severs our relationship to the eternal God. If we seek evidence for this, we can go to the shopping mall, and there we will see us, fevered consumers ready to throw off all hints of the eternal for the ceaseless consumption of bread that does not nourish, while Death stands in the shadows and laughs.” (pg 41.)

**1 Corinthians 15:54-57**  54 When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**On the Christian Funeral Service:**

“As theologian Shannon Craigo-Snell has said, the church performs the gospel, not because it already has the gospel mastered, but instead as a means to figure out what the gospel means.” (pg. 77)

“Death changes, but does not destroy, our relationship to the deceased, and in a Christian funeral, the deceased is still a member of the community of faith. The church walks along the pilgrim way and worships with the person who has died.” (pg. 96)

“A funeral governed by the gospel is built upon the eschatological hope that the deceased is not a static corpse or a gaseous and disembodied spirit, but an embodied child of God moving toward the communion of the saints.” (pg.97)

“At a funeral, the Christian community reenacts the past. What past? The exodus, when the people of God moved from bondage through the waters of the Red Sea to freedom in the promised land. The baptism of Jesus. The death and burial of Jesus. The baptism of the one who has died. All of these formative events, and more, are gathered into the funeral ritual. In reenacting these past events, a funeral takes the chaos and upheaval of death and gives it order and meaning. While death may feel and look like the world coming apart and life dissolving into meaninglessness, through the lens of the funeral ritual we can see it for what it truly is: a saint moving through the troubled waters into the promised land, a follower of Jesus traveling his same road, from death to resurrection life.” (pg.102)

“The service should have lots of music, and most of it, if not all of it, should be congregational song. Accompany them with singing! It is good for the voices of the community singing praise to be hard above the noisy clamor of death. If there is a soloist or a choir, don’t allow them to serenade the congregation. The experience of death cancels all concerts. We have holy work to do, to carry a brother or sister to the grave; so let the choir and the soloists walk along with us. Let them sing *with* the people and on their behalf.” (pg.172)

**4 necessary elements for a “good” funeral**

1. Holy Person – a deceased person who is viewed as a saint (in Christ).
2. Holy Place – a place with a sense of sacredness.
3. Holy People – a community of the faithful who see themselves as having a divine mission.
4. Holy Script – The truthful gospel narrative about life and death that the community can perform.

**3 Things to listen for in a funeral sermon**

1. Remembrance a life well lived.
2. Acknowledgement of the grief
3. The hope of the resurrection revealed & promised in Christ Jesus.