

## **The Value of Funerals/Memorial Services**

*“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” Mt. 6:26*

I am not the only person who has been disappointed in recent times by the family of a deceased acquaintance, friend, or relative not holding a funeral/memorial service for the deceased. In some cases, the family spokesperson says that there will be a service later - and there can be good reasons for delay - but then there is nothing.

And I'm not talking about the sort of service I've been acquainted with through the years. I prefer traditional services, but I'm not picky. They could call it a "Sendoff" or an "End of Life Gathering". They could just sit around telling stories involving the deceased or hold a formal dinner in his/her honor. What I don't much care for is nothing beyond an obituary. (I understand that given the expense of an obituary notice in the newspaper, many don't even get that. The number of people dying in Albuquerque is greater than the number of obituaries.)

It comes down to the question of who makes the decision. Obviously, most often it is the family who decides whether or not to have a funeral/memorial service. And family members are often influenced by the wishes of the deceased. Consequently, the service may include the deceased's favorite hymns or scripture readings.

But sometimes the family is guided by the deceased's wish not to have a service at all. In this case, who decides what to do?

This is a most difficult situation, and people are going to have to decide as they will, but here's where I come down. The funeral/memorial service isn't primarily for the benefit of the deceased. It is for the mourners. It is the chance to say goodbye in an official way, a time to express how much we appreciated this person being a part of our lives, a time to say thank you to God for the gift of the person's life. It is also a time to begin the work of grief, which is a work that many don't like to do. There are all sorts of good things occasioned by a funeral/memorial service. We lose out when there isn't opportunity.

Let me point out a guideline that flows from the scripture above. The essence of what Jesus means when he calls God "Father" is stated clearly in Mt. 6: 26. Our God values us and provides for our needs just like the best sort of father values and provides for his children. Does our response to the death of a companion, friend, or relative accurately express how much we valued him/her? Does our response provide us with the opportunity to grieve as we need to? -DJ

