

**If I Should Die...**  
**Bury me as a Christian and no other way.**

By Rev. Scott R. Murray

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My wife and I taught the well-known children's prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep..." to our little girl, Anastasia. This simple prayer warns that everyone needs to be ready to die. Death can come suddenly. The angel of death comes from God when God wills it—not necessarily when we expect it.

But if death may come without warning, is it still possible to prepare for it? Yes. The Christian has many avenues of preparation.

### **Faith**

If I should die, I pray to die in faith, that my heavenly Father my soul should take.

The most obvious preparation for death is faith. Not the airy-fairy faith of modern religious thinking, but the true Christian faith—the unconditional trust in the mercy of God who forgives our sins because of Christ.

Christian faith is living and active; it seeks constant immersion in the incarnational life of Christ in the Word and Sacrament ministry of the church. No Christian seeks to avoid the public preaching of the Word and the reception of Christ's body and blood. That would be a spiritual starvation-diet. Without heavenly food there would be no heavenly life (John 6:32-33, 53-58).

### **A Christian burial**

If I should die, give me a Christian burial. The Christian church buries only Christians.

A much-revered and now-retired pastor tells the story of being asked to do a funeral for someone he did not know. A wife called him to ask him to perform this Christian rite for her husband. The pastor asked the woman if her husband had been in the armed services. She replied that he had not. So the pastor asked, "Would you request a full honors burial from the armed forces then? That is what you are asking me to do."

A Christian burial is a full honors funeral for a soldier of the cross. If I should die, bury me as a soldier of the cross.

### **A church funeral**

If I should die, give me a church funeral. Do not choose a funeral-chapel funeral because it seems easier.

The Christian has come to the house of the Lord weekly to worship and sanctify the holy day by hearing God's Word. Here he has heard the holy absolution that assured to him

the forgiveness of sins. Here he enjoyed the fellowship of the baptized, washed in the blood of the Lamb. Here he received with the mouth of his body Christ's body and blood as a foretaste of the feast to come.

Now the Christian enjoys the fulfillment of what was promised and sealed to him in the liturgy of the church. The church reminds Christian mourners of Easter celebrations past. What a powerful comfort it is to stand in the presence of the resurrected Christ and be able to defy death to its very face.

If I should die, do not spend a lot of money on flowers. A few will do. Let them represent the power of the resurrection and the frailty of life in this world (Ps. 103:15-17). Instead of too many flowers, dedicate memorial gifts to Christ's church. No human organization, no matter how noble, is as important as my church.

### **Sing hymns**

If I should die, sing lots of those great Lutheran hymns. Let the organ thunder the praise of the resurrected Lord. Sing joyously to Christ who has redeemed a wretch like me. Sing the liturgy. Recite the Creed and thereby confess my faith and the faith of the holy church throughout all generations.

If I should die, let my funeral praise our God and His Christ to whom be glory forever.

### **Preach the Gospel**

If I should die, get the preacher to preach a Christian sermon. Do not eulogize me! Eulogize Christ and the riches of His glorious grace.

Preach Law and Gospel in classic Lutheran form. Preach as long as necessary. This is God's business and should not be crammed into a human timetable. Preach God's grace without stinting or adulteration, and in this way comfort the survivors with the everlasting Gospel of an eternal God (Ps. 103:15-17).

Preach the Gospel clearly and in a memorable way, because this may be the only time some of the people present will ever hear the Gospel. I met a man who, while a non-Christian, had heard the Gospel in a Christian funeral sermon for his grandfather at my church. Years later, when he felt a need for forgiveness, he knew exactly where to find it.

If just one of my non-Christian relatives would be converted to faith in Christ through the sermon at my Christian funeral, that would make it all worthwhile. If I should die, preach the Gospel.

### **A public funeral**

If I should die, my funeral must be public. The preaching of the Gospel is never a private event. The church is to preach the Gospel to the whole world. Please do not let anti-Christian cultural myths misdirect you to take the emotionally easiest path when

planning my funeral. You cannot avoid grief. You can only meet it with the comfort of a Christian funeral.

If I should die, make my funeral public for Christ's sake.

If I should die, please call my pastor right away. Have him bring the list of my funeral wishes so that he can help you plan a Christian funeral.