



Preaching Resources for Christian Weddings and Funerals



Preface to the Korean Edition

This resource has been created with the support of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)'s 2024 Proclamation Project. The 2024 Proclamation Project Korean team is deeply grateful for the opportunity to share the Wedding and Funeral Service Guide with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and all Christians across the country.

We are deeply aware that the spiritual growth of the faith community and the transformation of life through worship and the Word are possible, and we hope that this resource not only contributes to the growth and renewal of the faith community but also becomes a bridge for the solidarity and unity of believers in love.

The Bible translation used in this project is the "Revised New Korean Standard Version." This translation was chosen for its balance of fidelity to the original texts and its focus on improving readability and understanding in modern Korean, making it easier for readers from various generations and backgrounds to engage with and deeply understand God's Word.

Moreover, this project was created based on the values of diversity, equality, and inclusion. It opposes all forms of discrimination based on race, belief, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical or mental disabilities, and centers on respecting all people from God's perspective. One example of this is the use of "하느님" (Haneunim) instead of "하나님" (Hanim), which aims to emphasize the inclusivity of the Christian faith both directly and indirectly.

The service guide focuses on expanding traditional perspectives on marriage and funeral rites while reflecting the theology of the Disciples of Christ.* Through this, we aim to enrich the understanding of the significance of these services from the perspective of the Disciples of Christ and to help faith communities deeply experience God's presence, who dwells among us in our relationships, through each other and message.

* Disciples' Identity: We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us (<https://disciples.org/our-identity/>).

We offer this book with the hope that all Christians who use it as a resource for worship may encounter the Spirit of God, who loves all people impartially, both within themselves and in their relationships with others. We pray that this experience leads to a life rich in freedom, liberation, unity, and love.

2024 Proclamation Project Korean
Team Rev. Seungil Eo, Rev. Baek Hee Kim, Rev.
Kyungmok Lee,
Rev. KJ Kim, and Rev. Dr.
Miseon Choi Advisors: Rev. Dr. Myungsun Kang and
Rev. Chung Seong Kim

Note to the English Edition

This English edition of Preaching Resources for Christian Weddings and Funerals grows out of a Korean liturgical guide originally developed with support from the 2024 Proclamation Project of the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It has been translated with English-speaking congregations in mind and lightly adjusted so that it can be used across a variety of pastoral and cultural settings.

All Scripture readings here are drawn from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Our hope is that these resources will help ministers and communities proclaim God's comfort and promise at the thresholds of marriage and death, and that, through this shared work of worship, they will discern the Spirit's presence leading them into lives of freedom, reconciliation, and love.

Translators: Rev. Seungil Eo and Erin Eo

Christian Marriage

Table of Contents

- Dig Deeper
- Service Order
- Service Guideline
- Message Guideline

: Marriage/Remarriage

Mark 10:6–9

1 John 4:7–12

Genesis 2:20–24

Ephesians 4:2–3

: Same Sex Marriage

1 John 4:7–12

1 Corinthians 13

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

Dig Deeper

Premarital counseling, carried out over several sessions, can play an important role in preparing for marriage. It gives couples space to reflect on their shared values and the direction of their life together, to practice habits of mutual respect and consideration, and to develop patterns of communication that support a healthy relationship. In this way, they gain a deeper sense of their responsibilities and roles as marriage partners and begin to build a solid foundation for shared growth.

At the same time, some traditional elements of the wedding ceremony invite a fresh reflection from the standpoint of gender equality. Practices such as a father “giving away” his daughter to the groom, or cultural customs involving ceremonial exchanges of gifts, can be reconsidered in light of the conviction that marriage is a journey undertaken by two equal partners. Thoughtful planning allows the ceremony itself to embody this equality in its symbols and actions. Plus, as Christians, couples and congregations may also seek a form of celebration that is both modest and meaningful. From an ecological perspective, this can include choices such as limiting elaborate floral arrangements and wreaths, or favoring simpler, more sustainable decorations.

Through such preparation, the community can help couples shape a new beginning that is grounded in faith, animated by love, and attentive to justice and care for creation.

Ceremony Order

The order and specific form of the ceremony may be adapted as appropriate to the context and needs of those involved.

Entrance

Sentences of Scripture

Prayer

Declaration of Intent

Reading from Scripture

Sermon

Vows

Exchange of Rings or Other Symbols

Special Symbolic Acts

Prayer

Lord's Prayer

Candle Lighting

Announcement of Marriage

Charge

Blessing

Holy Communion

Benediction

Worship Guideline

The order and specific form of the ceremony may be adapted as appropriate to the context and needs of those involved. Please refer to the following guidelines.

Entrance

As guests gather, appropriate hymns or instrumental music may be played while the wedding party enters. This typically includes the couple, their families, attendants, and the officiant. The sequence and style of the Entrance can be arranged according to the preference.

During the Entrance, the congregation may stand and sing a hymn, or music may simply be played.

Sentences of Scripture

The officiant may begin the service, either before or after the processional, by using one of the following passages or another suitable Scripture to call the congregation into worship.

1 John 4:16 / Psalms 118:24 / Psalms 106:1

The officiant proclaims:

We have gathered in the presence of God:
To give thanks for the gift of marriage,
To witness the union of OOO and OOO,
To surround them with our prayers,
To ask God's blessing upon them,
That their life together may be strengthened,
And that they may grow in love toward God and one another.
We have gathered in the presence of God.

God has created us as unique individuals
and has given us the gift of marriage
so that two persons may help and comfort each other,
In prosperity and adversity,
In joy and in sorrow,
In sickness and in health,
And live faithfully together all the days of their lives.

God has given us marriage as a sacred covenant,
So that two distinct persons may fully express love,
Belong to one another,
And live in a relationship of mutual giving and tenderness.

God has given us marriage for the well-being of human society,
For the ordering of family life,
And for the birth and nurture of children.
God has given us marriage as a sacred mystery,
In which two become one,
As Christ is united with the Church.

In marriage, two persons are called into a new way of life,
Created, ordered, and blessed by God.
This way of life must not be entered into carelessly or from selfish motives,
But reverently, deliberately, and in a spirit of prayer.

We praise God for the gift of marriage,
Blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ,
And sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, marriage is to be held in highest honor among us.

Prayer

[Example A]

Gracious God,
Your love for us is steadfast.
Look with mercy upon OOO and OOO,
Who come seeking your blessing.
Grant them your Spirit,
That they may honor the vows they make today
With steadfast love and faithfulness.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Example B]

God of love,
As these two come together in your presence,
Bless this holy and joyful celebration.
Fill every part of this service with your Spirit,
That it may overflow with joy and hope.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Declaration of Intent

- For the Couple

The officiant may choose one of the following forms and address these questions to each of the partners in turn. This part of the service is conducted with all standing.

(Name), understanding that God has created, ordered, and blessed the covenant of marriage, do you intend to enter this covenant of your own free will?

I do.

If both are baptized Christians:

[Name], in your baptism you were called into union with Christ and the Church.

Do you now reaffirm that calling as you enter into this covenant of marriage?

I do.

- For Children:

If the couple have children and they too are becoming part of this new family, the following promises may be used.

[Name(s)], you are becoming part of a new family.

Do you promise to offer your trust, love, and affection to this family?

Each Couples: Yes, with God's help Child: Yes, with God's help.

The officiant asks the couple:

Will you be faithful and loving parents?

Couples: Yes, with God's help.

- For Families:

The officiant may invite the couple's family members to join in the following promises.

[Name(s)], do you bless OOO and OOO and promise to support their marriage to the best of your ability?

The couple's families respond:

We bless these two and promise to support them with love.

or simply, ***Yes, we do.***

The families may be seated.

- For the Congregation:

The officiant may invite the congregation to join in the following promises.

Will all of you, witnessing these vows, do everything in your power to uphold and care for these two in their marriage?

Yes, we will.

A hymn may be sung.

Reading from Scripture

The service begins with prayer. The following prayer, or similar words, may be used.

Gracious God,
Your covenant love sets us free and keeps us safe in your care. Our words change and falter, but your Word does not change. Speak to us now through that living and unchanging Word, that we may answer your gracious promises with lives of faithfulness and obedience. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

One or more passages of Scripture are read.

Sermon / Officiant's Remarks / Wedding Homily

After the Scripture readings, a brief sermon may be given, followed by a hymn. (For the Message Guideline, see page 17.)

Vows

The following may be done with the congregation standing or seated.

The officiant says to the couple:

OOO and OOO, you have declared your intention to enter into marriage. Now, you will join your right hands and, by your vows, become bound to one another as partners in life.

OOO and OOO, you face each other and join right hands. Then you say your vows in turn.

[Example A]

One says:

I, [Name], take you, [Name], to be my spouse.
Before God and in the presence of these witnesses,
I promise to be your loving and faithful partner,
in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow,
in sickness and in health,
for as long as we both shall live.

The other says:

I, [Name], take you, [Name], to be my spouse.
Before God and in the presence of these witnesses,
I promise to be your loving and faithful partner,
in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow,
in sickness and in health,
for as long as we both shall live.

[Example B]

One says:

Before God and in the presence of these witnesses,
I, [Name], take you, [Name], to be my spouse.
I promise to love you and to be faithful to you
for as long as we both shall live.

The other says:

Before God and in the presence of these witnesses,
I, [Name], take you, [Name], to be my spouse.
I promise to love you and to be faithful to you
for as long as we both shall live.

Exchange of Rings, or Other Symbols

When the rings are exchanged, the officiant may say:

“What do you bring as a sign of these promises?”

After the rings have been placed before them, the officiant may pray as follows:

“God, by your blessing may these rings (these gifts) be for OOO and OOO a sign of unending love and faithfulness. May they, through these gifts, remember the covenant they make today through Jesus Christ. Amen.”

The couple then exchange rings, using either Example A or Example B below, or other suitable words. If one of the partners is not a Christian, the traditional Trinitarian formula may be omitted.

[Example A]

As each ring is given, the one giving the ring says:

[Name], I give you this ring, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of our covenant.

The one receiving the ring says:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
I receive this ring as a sign of our covenant.

[Example B]

As each ring is given, the one giving the ring says:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
I give you this ring as a sign of our enduring faith and steadfast love.

Special Symbolic Acts

[Example A]

Unity Candle Ceremony

In this ceremony, two smaller candles are used to light one larger candle, symbolizing two lives becoming one.

[Example B]

Sand Ceremony

In this ceremony, two people pour sand of different colors into a single vessel, symbolizing their two lives being joined as one. In a remarriage service, children may also be invited to take part in this ritual.

Prayer

The couple may kneel.

One of the following prayers, or similar words, may be used.

[Example A]

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, savior and giver of all grace, you watch over the world you have made and redeemed.

May look with special favor upon OOO and OOO.

Grant them wisdom and devotion in the life they share, and give them strength for all that lies before them.

In times of trouble, make them wise and loving counselors to one another; in times of sorrow, comforters; in times of joy, companions in celebration.

Guide their purposes so that they align with your will, and shape their spirits so that they are one with your Spirit.

Walking with you, may they grow throughout their life together in love and in peace.

Give them grace, when they hurt one another, to recognize their fault, to confess their trespasses, and to seek forgiveness from one another and from you.

Let their shared life be a sign of your love
in this fragmented and broken world.
May their union overcome division and estrangement,
their forgiveness heal wrongs, and their joy conquer despair.

Through the love they build together,
enable them to embrace others as well.

[If it is your will, bless them with the gift of children,
and grant them wisdom to raise them well, to know you, love you, and serve you.]

May all who witness their vows today sense the strengthening of their life together.
May all who are already married remember and renew the promises they once made.

Let everyone present here learn to serve others
by loving and encouraging one another,
and so help to build your kingdom.
May every bond your children shape be transformed by your Spirit,
until your peace and justice cover the whole earth.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Example B]

Everlasting God, without your grace no promise can be sure.
Strengthen OOO and OOO with patience, kindness, gentleness,
and with all the gifts of your Spirit, that they may keep the vows they have made.

Keep them faithful to one another and to you.
Fill them with love and joy, that they may build a home of peace and hospitality.

Lead them by your word, that they may serve you all their days.

O God, help all of us to do your will in our homes and in our lives.
By your grace, enrich us to encourage and support one another,
That we may serve those who are in need.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Bring peace, love, and justice more and more to this earth. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

The officiant invites all to join in the Lord's Prayer.

Candle Lighting

When a three-candle stand is used, the two outer candles, representing the two persons being married, are lit first. They then light the center candle, which symbolizes their union, without extinguishing the outer candles. The center candle represents their oneness, while the two outer candles signify their individuality. In some places and traditions, the outer candles are extinguished after the center candle is lit, emphasizing the theme of "two becoming one."

Announcement of Marriage

The officiant proclaims to the congregation, using the following or similar words:

In the presence of God, and before all who are gathered here,
OOO and OOO have made sacred and lifelong vows to one another.
They have confirmed these promises by joining hands
and by the giving and receiving of rings.
Therefore, I now declare that they are joined to one another as spouses.
To the glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Now and Forever.

The officiant joins the couple's right hands.

The officiant and congregation may then say together:

What God has joined together, let no one separate.

Charge

The officiant exhorts the couple using one of the following scripture passages.

[Example A]

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

(Colossians 3:12–14, NRSV)

[Example B]

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

(Colossians 3:17, NRSV)

Blessing

The officiant blesses the couple and the congregation using one of the following:

[Example A]

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord show you kindness and grace.

May the Lord look on you with generosity and grant you peace. Amen.

[Example B]

May the grace of Christ be with you,

and may the love of God surround you.

May the Lord look on you with generosity and grant you peace. Amen.

Holy Communion

If the ceremony includes Holy Communion, the couple may bring bread and wine as the officiant goes to the table. The Lord's Supper is open to all, so everyone present is invited to take part. The couple receives the bread and the cup first, and then the other participants come forward in turn.

Benediction

The officiant blesses the couple and the congregation using one of the following.

[Example A]

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord show you kindness and grace.

May the Lord look on you with generosity and grant you peace. Amen.

[Example B]

May the grace of Christ be with you, and may the love of God surround you.

May the Holy Spirit keep you, so that you may live in faith, abound in hope, and grow in love, now and forever. Amen.

After the blessing, music may be played until the conclusion of the wedding.

Message Guideline

Marriage/Remarriage

1. Mark 10:6-9

Marriage signifies more than cohabitation or pragmatic partnership; it constitutes a spiritual and bodily union. In other words, the marital bond is to be understood as a relationship of such depth and scope that it cannot be reduced to a merely legal or social contract.

James D. G. Dunn, a leading British New Testament scholar, contends that Jesus' teaching on marriage stands in substantial continuity with Old Testament tradition, even as it presses beyond that tradition in fresh and radical ways. In grounding Jesus' instruction in the creation narratives, Dunn understands marriage as belonging to the divinely intended order of creation and as a sphere in which the reign of God is to find concrete embodiment. In this sense, he judges that Jesus' teaching serves to reaffirm and intensify the spiritual and moral significance of marriage.

2. 1 John 4:7-12

(1) Love as the Essence of God

John's affirmation that "God is love" underscores love as intrinsic to the very being of God. This means that love is not an optional attribute at the periphery of the divine life, but a defining reality at its core, and thus an indispensable mark of authentic Christian existence as it is grounded in relationship with God.

(2) Jesus Christ as Love Embodiment

The love of God is made concrete and visible in the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ. Here love is not reduced to inner feeling or pious speech, but

takes the form of embodied action, self-giving, and costly solidarity; in this sense Jesus may be described as the paradigmatic enactment, or incarnation, of divine love.

(3) Mutual Love of being a Christian

John therefore insists that, as God has loved us, so we ought to love one another. Such mutual love is not a merely optional ideal, but is constitutive of being a Christian, for in loving one another God abides in us and God's love is brought to completion in our midst.

[Reference]

- Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza¹

Feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza emphasizes that love must move beyond merely emotional bonds between individuals to become a social and communal praxis that realizes justice and equality. The love of God, in this view, is a liberating love that frees the oppressed and creates communities grounded in mutual respect.

- Marcus Borg²

Marcus Borg reads this Johannine vision of love not only as describing the relationship between God and human beings but also as showing how God is encountered in relationships among human beings. For Borg, love is theologically crucial because it dismantles the boundary between the divine and the human, so that in loving one another we come to know and experience God more deeply.

3. Genesis 2:20-24

(1) The Rib

¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995)

² Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015)

- a. Walter Brueggemann observes that the fact that the woman is formed from part of the man does not in itself entail her subordination. This does not imply that she is subject to the man, any more than the fact that the man is formed from the ground implies that he is subordinate to the soil.³
- b. The Hebrew word עֲצָמָא (tsela), traditionally rendered “rib,” can also be translated as “side.” The notion of “side” evokes equality and mutuality.
- c. Woman and man were created as corresponding companions for one another. What calls for our attention here are Adam’s words: “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” This resonates with the message Jesus later emphasizes: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It is an invitation to regard the other as one’s equal and beloved, to be treated with the same care with which one treats oneself.

(2) The Two Become One Flesh

- a. ‘Mutuality’ and ‘equality’ thus mark a new dimension of human identity. The human person is now understood as existing in relationship.
- b. When one and another are united so as to become one flesh, this points to a transformation and a kind of transcendence into a new mode of being. Imagine, for instance, a unity candle holder with three candles often used in wedding ceremonies. The two outer candles represent two distinct persons, irreducible to mere gender roles. When the two become one, it is not simply that two personalities or two lives are added together so that their “volume” increases. Rather, it signifies a change, a leap, a transcendence into a qualitatively new reality. The recognition of this unfamiliar identity, and the discernment of the direction in which this new life together is to move, become crucial.
- c. What is significant is the transition from ‘not good (v. 18)’ to ‘good (vv. 21–24).’
- d. We Disciples of Christ are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. In this light, marriage richly exemplifies the beauty of a united life.

³ Bill D. Moyers, *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 14.

(3) Leaving Father and Mother

- a. The Hebrew verb אָזַב ('azav), translated 'leave,' can denote not only physical departure but also withdrawing from a particular situation, such as breaking a covenantal arrangement. To put it bluntly, to 'leave' one's parents may be described as relinquishing the prior primary bond that has structured one's responsibilities and obligations. Yet, as texts such as Deuteronomy make clear, severing the relationship with one's parents stands in tension with the Old Testament's call to honor father and mother. It is therefore better, in the context of marriage, to understand this 'leaving' as a reordering or transfer of responsibility and obligation that had previously been directed toward one's parents, now decisively oriented toward one's marriage partner. [In ancient Jewish society, even after marriage, couples were expected to remain within the same kinship community rather than to depart to distant places.]
- b. Marriage, then, marks an expansion of the boundaries of one's responsibility and obligation. This widening of concern lies at the heart of the Christian spirit. A person who has been primarily focused on personal well-being and self-preservation now forms a household, the most basic unit of community, and assumes responsibility for the life of the closest other. This beginning is meant to signal a widening responsibility for others as we participate in the larger life of society.
- c. We Disciples of Christ join the Lord's table every week to emphasize 'the Lord's unconditional love that welcomes us just as we are,' and at the same time to confess that 'we are sisters and brothers who have become one body in Jesus Christ.' This 'mutuality' invites us into shared responsibility and obligation for others. And marriage, in turn, summons us into this mutuality.

4. Ephesians 4:2-3

(1) Humility and Gentleness

- a. "With all humility"

The Greek term ταπεινοφροσύνη (*tapeinophrosynē*) denotes a willingness to 'make oneself low.' The apostle Paul emphasizes that imitating Christ in

humility is a central Christian virtue. Such humility is not only a lowering of oneself but also a disposition and a pattern of action that honor others.

b. “With gentleness”

Gentleness translates the Greek word *πραΰτης* (*prautēs*), which denotes strength held in check and under control. Gentleness is a soft yet strong disposition, responding not with anger or complaint but with love.

(2) Bearing with One Another in Love with patience

a. “With patience”

Patience is a virtue of mature people. It signifies a readiness to wait with others, without hastily exposing or condemning their mistakes and shortcomings. It is the posture of refusing to flare up quickly and instead making room for others.

b. “Bearing with one another in love”

Here ‘bearing with’ does not mean mere tolerance. It is a forbearance grounded in love, accompanied by patient understanding and a willingness to carry one another’s weaknesses.

(3) Oneness the Spirit Created in the Bond of Peace

a. “The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”

Peace is a crucial element in shaping a reconciled community. It is more than the mere absence of conflict; it is a dynamic process of forming deep trust and reconciliation, in which people live united in harmony.

b. “Make every effort to maintain it”

The expression ‘make every effort’ suggests that maintaining peaceful relationships is not easy. By God’s grace, believers have already been made one in Christ, yet sustaining this unity requires ongoing effort and sacrifice.

Same Sex Marriage

1. 1 John 4:7-12

(1) Marriage, What it Means: “Why was I born?” “How should I live?”

- a. The questions are reflective ones that every human being asks at some point. Yet you two, who come to be married today, have likely wrestled with them, both inwardly and outwardly, more often and more intensely than many others.
- b. Marriage offers one of the most fundamental and significant answers to these questions. At this wedding, to the question “Why was I born?” you now give this answer: “To love this one person who stands before me.” And to the question “How should I live?” you respond, “I choose to live by loving the one who stands before me.” Perhaps at times you have faced judgments and hostile glances that said, “You must not live that way.” But now, in this moment, you are not accepting the negative verdict, “You must not live that way,” but making a positive and active choice: “I will love this person.” You and I were born in order to love, and we bear both the responsibility and the privilege of living in love. Marriage means stepping onto this path of privilege and responsibility.

(2) Choice

- a. As already suggested, marriage is a choice.
- b. Many people think of “love” primarily as a feeling. If that were so, then love could change as easily and as frequently as our emotions change from moment to moment. Yet love is not an uncontrollable feeling. Rather, love is an act of the will.
- c. This means that we can choose whom we will love and how we will love.
- d. To marry is not merely to “fall into” a love based on attraction and affection. It is to choose the person one will love and to choose the way of life one will walk in from this day forward.
- e. This wedding liturgy is therefore an occasion to bless, affirm, and bear witness to your choice.

(3) Love in Action

- a. In a few moments, we will share in the Lord's Supper, one of the central practices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). On the night before his death, Jesus shared a meal with his disciples and commanded them to "do this in remembrance of me," with the cross as the sign of his life and death.
- b. The cross of Jesus signifies a life given in sacrifice for others and the power of love to break the vicious cycle of violence. Jesus did not leave us merely with a profound idea; he entrusted to us a concrete practice. We have been given both the responsibility and the privilege of remembering and enacting this way of love.
- c. The passage from 1 John 4 calls us to remember this love of Jesus and invites us into its practice.
- d. We are called to live for others, not only for ourselves to break cycles of violence through love and to form cycles of love in their place. Through our practical acts of love, the love of God revealed on the cross is brought toward its fulfillment among us.
- e. The Lord's Supper also proclaims, 'the Lord's unconditional love that welcomes us just as we are' and at the same time confirms that 'we are sisters and brothers who have become one body in Jesus Christ.' Marriage invites us into a life of mutuality, sharing responsibility for one another's lives. Today, following the example of this couple, let us also choose to live out a beautiful love in our own lives.

(4) Happiness

Above all, heartfelt prayers are offered for your happiness. May the image of God be revealed through your love for one another, and through the love of all of us who, as witnesses and companions to your union, share in that love.

2. 1 Corinthians 13

(1) Key Terms

a. ἀγάπη (agapē) – love

ἀγάπη (agape) may be understood as a form of love that goes beyond exclusivist understandings of relationship. It symbolizes the love of God that transcends every socially constructed boundary of gender, sexual orientation, race, class and so on. ἀγάπη (agape) reminds us that, whomever we love, every person is beloved as one who bears the image of God.

b. μακροθυμεῖ (makrothymeī) – be long suffering

This can symbolize the resilience of LGBTQI+ communities who continue to struggle for justice and love, even while facing oppression and discrimination.

c. ζηλοῖ (zēloi) – be jealous

The passage underlines that love need not be competitive or exclusionary. In the light of God's abundant love, human love can move beyond jealousy into reciprocal solidarity and an inclusive embrace.

(2) Message Overview: “The greatest of these is love”

a. Love is Radical and Embracing Power

God, in Jesus, becomes human. This is a transcendent love that crosses over the boundary between the divine and the human. If love is the very being of God, then love is a power that transcends and embraces all identities and relationships. (Patrick Cheng argues that) so-called exclusivist forms of love are not truly love at all, but pale imitations of God's radical hospitality.⁴

b. vv. 1–3: Without Love, Everything is in Vain

Paul speaks of the futility of all gifts and achievements in the absence of love. Put positively, to love and to be loved is what gives our lives their true meaning and joy.

⁴ Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2011), 51.

c. vv. 4–7: The Qualities of Love

Verses 4 through 7 describe the characteristics of love: patient, kind, not envious or boastful, and so on. These are not abstract notions but concrete practices of loving the other. They also show the attitudes that a community should embody toward the people around it. With love, the church is on the way to embrace those who suffer under socially constructed prejudice, and to willingly celebrate diversity rather than merely tolerate it. Ultimately, to say that “love rejoices in the truth” is to say that we bless one another together with God, who has created everything in countless varieties.

d. vv. 8–13: The Eternity of Love

Love is everlasting. All things made by humans pass away, but the God who created the universe in love is eternal. This creative, life-giving love continues to sustain our lives even now. The message that “the greatest of these is love” once more underscores that divine love, as God’s very being, is the foundation of all life. There is neither boundary nor limit to this love. Love dismantles oppressive ideologies and moves us to welcome all in hospitality.

Likewise, God moves in radical love in ways analogous to how LGBTQI+ people break down fixed boundaries. (As Cheng puts it,) God’s radical love dissolves the boundaries between the divine and the human, between the powerful and the weak, and between knowing and unknowing, while queer people, in their own lives, dissolve rigid boundaries of sexuality and gender. For God, these boundaries include those between divinity and humanity, life and death; for LGBTQI+ persons, they include those between male and female and between homosexual and heterosexual.⁵

e. The Call to Live Out Love

I Corinthians 13 thus summarizes the transforming power of love. Cheng notes that Jesus Christ is the “embodiment of radical love,” a “boundary-crosser extraordinaire” who, throughout his earthly ministry, crossed “divine, social, sexual, and gender boundaries.” Jesus persistently challenged the religious and social boundaries of his time: he ate with tax collectors, sex workers, and sinners; he touched those deemed “unclean,” such

⁵ Cheng, *Radical Love: Introduction to Queer Theology*

as lepers and the hemorrhaging woman; and he spoke with Samaritans and the socially marginalized. In so doing, he broke down what were regarded as “sacred” boundaries between purity and impurity, holy and profane, saint and sinner. He challenged the religious and political authorities of his day, and for this he was put to death on a cross.⁶

3. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

A. Introduction

Its central message, being so clear, readily highlights the importance of cooperation, solidarity, and comfort. These values apply not only to marriage, especially same-sex marriage, but also to many other forms of relationship. However, understanding the historical and theological context of the book of Ecclesiastes can offer readers a deeper sense of comfort and challenge.

B. Historical Context of Ecclesiastes

- Ecclesiastes is generally situated in the later period of Israel’s history, most plausibly between the Persian period and the early Hellenistic era (fifth to third centuries BCE). It addresses Jewish oppression under foreign domination and the crisis of covenantal identity.
- As a work composed under imperial rule, Ecclesiastes interrogates, resists, and challenges not only imperial structures of power but also the cultural and ideological discourse of the ruling elites. At the same time, it seeks to affirm Israel’s faith and cultural distinctiveness and, above all, to articulate the enduring validity and viability of a God-centered life.

C. The Overarching Theological Perspective of Ecclesiastes

- The overarching and well-known theme of Ecclesiastes is encapsulated in the word “vanity.” This motif gives voice both to the injustice of the world as experienced in oppressive situations and to resistance against the value systems imposed by empire. It also suggests that imperial power is not

⁶ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 79–80.

eternal, exposing its limits and transience. Ecclesiastes thus emphasizes the importance of humility and piety, while critiquing especially competitive worldviews that place excessive value on wealth, power, and success.

- It seeks to impart an alternative imagination that enables the colonized to live through their circumstances. This imagination points toward a transformed social order and new forms of relationship. Today's passage, Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, stands at the heart of this new vision.
- v.11: "If two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?"
 - This image symbolizes the effort to sustain basic human needs and dignity.
 - In both ancient Judah and our own diverse political and cultural contexts, systems often disrupt solidarity and promote isolation, but this verse expresses the will to restore our humanity within community.
 - It points beyond mere survival to hope and comfort amid suffering.
 - It also connects with the spiritual care that faith provides.

D. Marriage

- Marriage is the fruit of love shared between two people.
- Moreover, it signifies cooperation, solidarity, and comfort, as the fruit of the community's blessing and support for that union.
- It is an expression of the will to recover our humanity, to keep one another warm in an increasingly competitive, isolated, and discriminatory society.
- Let us share together the blessing, hope, and comfort that God offers through the message of Ecclesiastes.

Christian Farewell

Table of Contents

- Understanding on Death
- Dig Deeper
- Service Order
- Service Guideline
- Message Guideline

: With the Dying

John 14:1-4; 25-27

Isaiah 11:1-10

: After Death

Hebrews 11:1-3

- After a Sudden or Unexpected Death

Romans 12:12-20

Lamentations 3:19-26

- When a Person Dies by Suicide

Kings 19:1-13

Luke 18:31-34

Understanding on Death

Death is the final horizon that every human life must face. It is a process that affects the deceased and all those connected to them.

From Disciples Perspective

1. We Are a Movement

The identity of the Disciples is located less in fixed doctrines or historical milestones than in a living activity still in motion here and now.⁷ “You and I” are interwoven within this movement. Within it, those who lived in the past, those who inhabit the present, and those in whom life will yet be revealed are all interconnected. “We” has not yet been fully defined. When the action of God in love flows through our ongoing movement, we identify who we are. “We” are expressed as a movement, in which life and death are connected within one breath.

2. For Wholeness in a Fragmented World

The movement that identifies Disciples willingly inhabits the reality of a broken world. Rather than pronouncing judgments on right and wrong or drawing rigid lines between good and evil, it grieves the world’s lack of wholeness. The direction of Disciples, thus, is toward every process by which, amid the fragmented conditions of life, love works for wholeness.⁸ Different life stories still wait to be gathered into love. Consequently, both life and death are unceasingly invested with meaning within the web of relationships that lead toward wholeness.

⁷ Peter Goodwin Heltzel, James O. Duke, Verity A. Jones, and William J. Nottingham, “Disciples Theology in the Twenty-first Century,” in *Chalice Introduction to Disciples Theology*, ed. Peter Goodwin Heltzel (Danvers: Chalice Press, 2008), 28–33.

⁸ Sandhya Jha, *Room at the Table: Struggle for Unity and Equality in Disciples History* (Danvers: Chalice Press, 2009), 85–93.

3. As Part of the One Body of Christ

The movement of the Disciples toward wholeness is grounded in the eschatological hope of belonging as members of the one body of Christ.⁹ Our being part of Christ's one body is sustained by covenant, which entails the loving obligation to bear one another. You and I are not discrete, self-contained units. From the firm ground of hope in the fullness of Christ's one body, we seek paths of hospitality and solidarity, reconciliation and cooperation. Life, therefore, is an invitation into community, and death, joined to the hope of completion, becomes an event of being embraced sustained by the community.

4. We Welcome All

The lived expression of the Disciples' life takes shape as hospitality. Life is the event in which God's hospitable activity becomes manifest in the world, and death is the scene in which the traces of a life given for the wholeness of a fragmented world are embraced without cost. In this community of hospitality that joins heaven and earth, no being - no person, no ecosystem, nothing that exists within all creation - is excluded.¹⁰ "All" means, quite literally, "all." The movement toward pro-reconciliation impels us to resist every form of discrimination that arises in the concrete situations of our lives and, in particular, to oppose those entrenched habits of exclusion that are embedded in social structures (e.g. anti-racism).

5. To the Lord's Table

The Disciples' practice of hospitality unfolds as the natural conversation that arises around a shared table. Sprinkle characterizes Disciples theology as "non-authoritarian and participatory," inviting the whole people of God into shared interpretation.¹¹ Disciples are encouraged "to reflect on what we believe with accountability,

⁹ Heltzel et al. "Disciples Theology in the Twenty-first Century," op. cit. 30-2.

¹⁰ Belva Brown Jordan and Stephanie A. Paulsell, "The Lord's Supper," in *Chalice Introduction to Disciples Theology*, 156-57.

¹¹ Stephen V. Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology: Understanding the Faith of a People in Covenant* (Danvers: Chalice Press, 1999), 122-33, 139-40.

imagination, and critical thought.”¹² At the center of Disciples worship stands the invitation to the hospitable table. No barrier and no discrimination conditions this invitation. At the Lord’s Table we remember, recognize, and covenant ourselves as a community of hospitality. In the practices that embody this covenant we say who we are. Baptism, together with the Lord’s Table, functions as a sign of promise and participation in our being made one. Thus, the whole journey from birth to death is encompassed within a life journey toward Christian unity.

6. As God Has Welcomed Us

The wellspring of hospitality in the Disciples’ journey toward unity lies in the awareness of, the tasting of, and delighting in God’s own hospitality toward us. God’s hospitable breath toward the world has come to expression as our very life, and the hope of being gathered into God’s embrace at the end of our breath is given to all. In the face of this hope, “all” stand on equal ground and are drawn together under the call to reconciliation. In the light of God’s hospitality, “death as the hope of resting in oneness” marks the beginning of a new reconciling work.

¹² Ibid.

Dig Deeper

Pastors/preachers are invited to participate in the lives of congregants in many ways throughout the various seasons of life. In particular, the Christian funeral is a gracious and reverent way of “saying farewell” to the deceased. Within Christian faith, this final parting leads us into a process of thanksgiving that embraces the many emotions tied to the memories of a shared life with the deceased, or into a process of remembering those memories truthfully. It finally offers to the deceased and to those who remain the promise of harmonious union in Christ, so that the farewell carries with it the hope of “seeing again.”

The boundary between death and life varies across cultures. Yet urban dwellers – shaped by capitalism as an economic philosophy, consumerism as a pattern of desire, and science as a new form of authority – often find their views of death changing. For example, while funeral liturgies have often become more simple in form, their center of gravity has shifted toward the remembrance and commemoration of those who remain.

The advancement of technology has also provided more varied ways of remembering and commemorating. As the pastoral context is changing, pastoral ministry that accompanies people through key life passages calls for a communal as well as varied spiritual approach, including artistic approaches that carry spiritual tasks: poetry, music, visual art, and other forms of symbolic expression. However, within the Korean churches, the available artistic resources, including music, are not only limited in quantity but often overly doctrinal in content or one-directional in communication. There is, therefore, an urgent need for diverse and creative new works of poetry, music, visual art, and other expressive forms.

Alongside a basic order of service, there is also a need for collections of messages that help congregations read Scripture from new perspectives. Even if this takes

time, our understanding of Christian faith requires a more structural and holistic transformation. Through renewed, careful engagement with biblical texts related to dying and funerals, it is also desirable that the messages and forms of our funeral practices be reshaped from a transformed perspective.

In interpreting the scriptural passages used, it is crucial to remember that God is always the faithful One who accompanies both individuals and communities. Texts may be chosen from verses that the deceased loved in life, passages previously selected by the deceased, or readings chosen by the preacher. Whatever the text, it should bring to mind both the remembered life of the deceased and the hoped-for future of those who remain.

In consultation with, and at the request of, the bereaved family, a variety of forms of service can be used. Christian funerals typically include three dimensions within the rites of dying and burial: 1) consolation and remembrance (past remembrance), 2) expression and thanksgiving, and 3) hope of seeing again in reconciliation and union (future hope).

1. Past Remembrance

In preaching, the minister may speak of the life of the deceased, including personal accomplishments and the legacy of faith shared across family, workplace, school, church, and other communities. When memories also bring to mind regrets or failures, the focus should be gently redirected toward the unceasing grace of God (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).

2. Future Hope

Those who loved the deceased experience separation through the funeral. For those who remain, this separation is not a single, isolated event but an ongoing experience. Thus the preacher is called to encourage mourners to remember not only God who is being in the present, but also God who will be with them in unforeseen ways (in times and places not yet imagined) in the future. In many cases, the bereaved have little opportunity during the funeral period itself to face their grief and separation fully. For this reason, it is important to remember that pastoral care often truly begins only when they return to the empty home after the funeral is over.

3. Do's and Don'ts

There are many different ways in which people come to death (natural causes, illness, accident, euthanasia, suicide, and so on), and the relational context also varies (grandparents, parents, spouses, children, friends, etc.). Cultural, ethnic, and religious settings differ as well. In addition, the wishes of the deceased regarding the funeral, the perspectives and circumstances of the family, and surrounding conditions all contribute to a wide variety of concrete decisions and practices. Within this diversity, the pastor's task is to help people remember the deceased and to lead all involved to recall the steadfast grace and love of God.

The preacher may invite close family members, friends, co-workers, or members of the church community to offer "eulogies," or may listen to their stories in advance and weave them into the message.

It is important to remember that the funeral sermon is not an occasion for religious "conversion campaigns." A Christian funeral is a shared process of saying farewell to a member of the faith community or to a neighbor in the wider society who was bound to us in life. It is a time to share the pain and sorrow of loss, to be present together in comfort, and to remember and commemorate the relational meaning of the deceased's life. Within this process, the pastor can help the local community encounter the communal and spiritual presence of the gospel in their midst.

In preparing the funeral, it is also important to recognize that pastors will hear many and varied family stories. Most will grieve their parting and speak of what was good in the deceased. Yet there may also be those who carry negative feelings (hatred, resentment, desire for revenge, etc.) because of broken relationships. Preachers should not avoid those who hold such painful emotions but may instead create space for "reconciliation and forgiveness" with the deceased. In this way, remembrance of the deceased can remain honest.

4. Use of Scripture

In many different ways, pastors seek to convey the simple yet demanding theme that "the God of love is with us unconditionally, at all times and in all places."

Together with the grieving family, the pastor recalls the life story and legacy of faith of the deceased, while also helping them look toward the love and hope of

God, who continues to work anew today and tomorrow through those who remain.

In Christian funerals, heaven and hell are themes where popular understandings often diverge from the thrust of Scripture, even as they are closely tied to the hope and comfort of believers. Preachers should keep the following in mind.

First, avoid presenting “heaven” and “hell” in a simple, rigid dichotomy. Pastors should also recognize that many Christians draw deep comfort from an assurance of “heaven” after death, understanding heaven as the place where God is and where those who trust in God are gathered - the “kingdom of heaven,” or “heavenly realm” (Rom 8:39).

Of course, “heaven” in the Scripture signifies a realm whose meaning is not bound to the dimensions of time and space as we know them. To communicate this, it is helpful to seek fitting metaphors or narratives that illustrate scenes where justice-seeking peace is fully realized.

Hell is not a spatial or temporal concept in the same way. Rather than speaking of hell as a location, it can be more helpful to describe it in terms of the absence of God: the inability to experience God, the loss of God’s love and forgiveness, the lack of God’s peace and reconciliation (suffering, death, illness, discrimination, and estrangement, etc.) as expressions of God’s absence and deprivation.

Where necessary, references to “hell” should not be framed in fear-based rhetoric, but within the larger context of the eschatological victory of the church and solidarity in Christ, emphasizing shared life and union rather than terror.

5. Commemoration after the Funeral

Some time after the funeral service, the family and community may choose to hold a memorial gathering in a bright and peaceful atmosphere, inviting relatives and neighbors to share stories of the deceased’s faith and way of life, or memorable anecdotes from life with them.

Such a service can become a time to honor the life of the deceased, to recall the values of faith and life they passed on, and to remember the love and dedication they embodied, all in a warm and hopeful setting. In this way, the life of the deceased can be remembered more vividly, and the special moments shared with them can be recalled as a source of mutual comfort and encouragement.

Service Order

The order and format of the service may be adapted to the situation. In consultation with the family, the viewing and final farewell may take place either before or after the funeral, and a eulogy or tribute by family or friends may be included in the service.

Call to Worship

Hymn

Opening Remarks

Prayer

Reading from Scripture

Sharing Message

Hymn

Eulogy or Tribute

Viewing and Farewell

Benediction

Service Guideline

The order and format of the service may be adapted to the situation. Please refer to the guidelines below.

Call to Worship

Psalm 123:1–3a (NRSV)

“To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us.
Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, ...”

Psalm 42:1, 2, 5 (NRSV)

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?
Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”

One of the following passages may also be chosen and shared:

Psalm 27:1–7

Isaiah 11:1–9

Revelation 21:4–7

Daniel 12:2–3

Hymn

One of the following hymnals may also be chosen and shared.

See His Glory / Lift Up Your Eyes to the Lord
Far Away in the Depths of My Spirit (Wonderful Peace)
The Steadfast Love of the Lord
Be Not Afraid / Do Not Be Afraid
For Great Is His Love toward Us

Opening Remarks

Today we are here to remember and honor OOO,
who was our family and our friend.
We also come together so that those who are grieving, and all who are here,
may be connected to one another as a source of comfort and support.
As we remember OOO, we hold on to the hope that we will be united again.
We look for heavenly mercy to give us comfort and peace.

Prayer

[Example A] – With the Dying

God, Lord of life,
You are the one who hears and answers all our needs, petitions, and prayers.

Now we are gathered at the bedside of OOO
as we stand together in the moment of the last breath.
Be near to OOO in this moment and receive OOO into your loving arms,
grant peace and rest,
and surround us with your comfort.

Though the pain of parting from OOO leaves us at a loss for words,
grant us the faith and hope of the resurrection,
and, above all, by your love, embrace our sorrow in your arms.
We pray in your holy name. Amen.

[Example B] – After Death

Heavenly God, you are the Lord of life, the one who has breathed life into us and who, in your time, takes back that very breath.

Your loving activity has been woven through the whole life of the late OOO, and now remains with us in many different fragrances of memory.

Today, with these gifts of remembrance, we grieve and we miss OOO, and we also seek comfort and dare to hope.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

We, who are fragile and bound by limited time, have been invited into lives of connection and reconciliation.

As we remember the late OOO, who lived out a unique story in this world, we, too, long to be joined and reconciled.

Within this remembrance, may your work of love draw us all into your oneness.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Our comfort, our hope, you are among us in love.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reading from Scripture

One or more Scripture passages may be read.

Psalm 46 – God is our refuge and our strength, the source of our help.

Psalm 136 – The faithful love of God endures forever.

Isaiah 42, 43, 65 – God who is always doing a new thing.

Matthew 28:20 – The Lord’s promise that he is with us always.

Hebrews 13:8 – The faithfulness of Lord yesterday, today, and forever.

After the reading of Scripture, there may be a brief devotion, followed by a hymn.

Sharing Message

After the message, a hymn may be sung. (For the Message guide, see page 43.)

Eulogy or Tribute

This is an important time to honor the life of the deceased and to share the impact and memories they have left with us. Usually, a member of the family or a close friend will offer this tribute. In the eulogy, we recall the character, life story, values, and accomplishments of the deceased, and the positive influence they had on those around them, often through moving stories and reflections. Through the eulogy, those present are invited to hold the deceased in their hearts once more and, even in the midst of grief, to celebrate and give thanks for their life.

Viewing and Farewell

This is a time to pay last respects to the deceased during the viewing, either before the casket or while looking at the memorial photo. During this time, those present may remember the deceased, share their sorrow, and, in a spirit of prayerful remembrance, keep silence or pray for the deceased's peace. This time of condolence is an important part of the funeral, giving family and friends an opportunity both to honor the life of the deceased and to offer words of comfort to the bereaved family.

Hymn

One of the following hymns may be chosen and sung together.

O God, Our Help in Ages Past (CH 67)

My Shepherd, You Supply My Need (CH 80)

Great Is Thy Faithfulness (CH 86)

The God of Us All (CH 84)

God of Our Life (CH 713)

It Is Well with My Soul

The Lord's My Shepherd

My Shepherd Will Supply My Need

Benediction

[Example A] – With the Dying

Now

May the grace of Jesus Christ, who leads us into peace even amid despair,
and the love of God, who is the source of all life,
and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us,

Be with OOO, who stands between life and death,
and with all of us who renew our faith in the hope of the resurrection,
now and forevermore.

Amen.

[Example B] – After Death

Here and now,
among those who grieve and are parting from the deceased OOO,
may the grace of Christ Jesus, who weeps with us
and the love of God, who has shared love with us through OOO's life,
and the breath of the Spirit, who has dwelt in OOO as the work of love
and who now dwells among us,

Rest upon the family and friends who carry loving memories of OOO,
and upon all who seek, in unity, to continue OOO's work of love.
May mercy and comfort be with us in the hope of seeing one another again.
In this life, here and now, and until the day we are united in Christ.
And may this blessing remain with all of us,
forever and ever. Amen.

Message Guideline

With the Dying

Pastors face many different end-of-life situations. These may involve long-known church members or relatives of members whom they are meeting for the first time. When asked to make an end-of-life pastoral visit, they should consider the following questions.

1. Where is the person at their final moments: hospital, home, nursing home ...
2. Who is present at the bedside: family, children, relatives, nurses, doctors ...
3. What is the person's condition: Communicative, Responsive, Conscious ...
4. What is their religious/faith background? and church affiliation?
5. How is the person approaching their own death?

1. **John 14:1-4; 25-27**

[Example A]

In this moment, we begin to prepare for our parting from OOO between life and death. No words can ever comfort the pain and sorrow of saying goodbye to someone we love.

The author of today's Gospel speaks to us with words of comfort, telling us not to worry and not to be afraid. We often feel that a few verses or a single story from Scripture may not seem able to fully meet or heal the grief and pain we will have to endure. "Do not worry, do not be afraid;" It is likely to be sounded as an empty cry to some of us.

And yet, friends, look around you. The reason we are here at this moment is that we share the hope and faith of the resurrection, together. This is why, even as we grieve our parting from OOO, we do not fall into despair.

We all recognize that the pain of saying goodbye cannot be removed in an instant. This farewell to OOO will leave us grieving, hurting, and feeling deep sorrow for quite some time. It may take a long while before the wounds and bruises in our hearts settle into a quiet strength.

When that time comes, remember this moment. Remember this hour when, our standing together between life and death, we renewed our “hope and faith in the resurrection.” So, with the love of Christ, let us comfort and encourage one another and endure this painful time together. Beloved in Christ, together with all of us, do not worry and do not be afraid. The Lord who has risen will comfort us and grant us his peace among us during that time.

[Example B]

Thomas (v. 5): How can we know the way?

Philip (v. 8): Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.

Judas (v. 22): How is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?

Saying goodbye to a family member/relative/friend/fellow can leave wounds and scars on our hearts that, like scars on our bodies, may never fully fade. Yet Thomas come to faith in the risen Jesus precisely through the wounds and scars in Jesus’ hands.

While a hope in “heaven” can bring a measure of comfort, the wounds and scars can also bear witness to the message of the resurrection, the risen again story.

In today’s passage, three disciples come to Jesus with questions. Their three questions can be seen as part of a process in which their own wounds and scars are being brought into the light.

As we face the death of someone we love, some of us may respond like Thomas, with doubt and questions: “If death in this world is not the end, where are we going?” Others may respond like Philip, willing to believe only if they are shown some clear “reality” or “proof.” Still others may be like Judas, asking whether Jesus’ way makes sense according to the world’s demand for efficiency and proof.

For the disciples who questioned Jesus, and for those who suffer as they confront death, the ultimate word of comfort was “heaven.”

So where is this “heaven?”

Jesus says it is “my Father’s house,” “a house with many dwelling places.” Heaven is a home where anyone, without condition, is loved, not forgotten, and welcomed.

This “home” is the gathering of those who live out love, forgiveness, and reconciliation that Christ has shown, which could be a church, a small group, a workplace, a school, and so on.

It is in the process, more than in the perfection, that the “love and forgiveness” and “reconciliation and unity” are made real.

Perhaps “the coming kingdom” can never be fully realized in our lifetime. Even so, if there are people who are not ashamed to show their wounds and scars, who choose to love a little more, to forgive, and to attempt reconciliation, then anyone, at some point, will be able to experience at least a shadow of “heaven.” We have the home because we are the home.

2. Isaiah 11:1-10

Where do we find hope when we face death? What does “heaven” look like when it feels so far away? Isaiah’s vision is powerful because it speaks to people in despair, whether in the 8th century BCE (in the despair of exile), in the first century (in the eschatological hope for the heavenly kingdom), or today (in the grief of parting while longing for heaven).

1) God’s Kingdom: Already/Not Yet

The “shoot from the stump of Jesse (v. 1)” has often been understood as a prophetic image of the Messiah, Jesus. Mark 1 also illustrates that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness “with the wild animals” at the very beginning of his ministry. (Both narratives hold the beginning of new creation and simultaneously its incompleteness.) The kingdom has “already” broken into us, shown through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And yet, this kingdom has “not yet” been brought to completion, and so we continue to long for its fullness.

2) God's Kingdom: Peace, Love, and Reconciliation

There is no fragmentation, violence, or war in the Kingdom. Every one of us may have “enemies” in some form (such as the physical or mental illnesses causing suffer, the broken relationship, or social discrimination). Sometimes we imagine God who simply defeats our enemies. Yet when we stand before death, the greatest enemy, it can make us feel powerless, as though God has allowed even this enemy to remain. Before this “death,” we long for the Kingdom that Isaiah evokes:

vv. 6-8: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.”

3) God's Kingdom: Work in Progress (Built Together)

Before death, every one of us is fragile and equal. Yet we long for the kingdom so that when we grieve and weep, we still grieve with hope. We learn that the kingdom is not a place after death, nor a reality in the distant future. Rather, it is the reality we are called to live into and cultivate together as a new creation, even as we wait for the world that is yet to come.

In this moment, there are no words that can truly comfort us in our sorrow and anguish. Isaiah's vision also may feel unreal or too ideal. Yet may the Spirit deepen in us a longing for the kingdom of peace – of reconciliation, forgiveness, and love. With the kingdom being formed in us, let us take one more step toward reconciliation, one more step toward forgiveness, and one more step toward love.

After Death

- **Death:** A Communal Event Toward Eschatological Union

Hans Walter Wolff describes life and death in the Old Testament by emphasizing that human beings are creatures who vanish like a breath. Yet, drawing on Jacob's blessings (Gen. 49), he argues that the one who is dying in fragility is the very one who beholds the brand-new future; therefore, when a person faces finitude and fragility, that person becomes a witness to God's promise. The Old Testament refuses to beautify or mythologize human death. Death is a universal reality that all human beings must face, and therefore life itself is understood as the opportunity given to finite, fragile humans to extend and deepen kinship, learning to become family within an ever-widening network of relationships.¹³

Stanley J. Grenz seeks to understand the individual's death within the wider horizon of universal history and God's eschatological achievement. From the perspective of the future hope of re-creation and the perfection of community, he interprets personal death in relation to the consummation of the community of God.¹⁴

Our fragile and finite breath is itself an expression of God's loving activity. As God's action, our lives unfold within the circle of being embodied in the earth and turning back to God. Human death, therefore, becomes clear testimony to love even as it remains a story of love not yet fully written. This unfinished story invites the participation of all who still draw breath.

- **Humanity:** God's Breath and Activity (*ruach*/רוּחַ)

According to Grenz, human beings are "a unity of one being with complex functions". Also, Wolff examines Hebrew words referring to human beings in the Old Testament and explains that as *nephesh* (נֶפֶשׁ, soul), humanity is desiring beings who long for life from desire to purpose; as *ruach* (רוּחַ, spirit), humanity is God's breath and activity and are granted full authority as subjects of life; while as *basar* (בָּשָׂר, body), human beings are explained as beings with fragility and limitations. *Ruach* (רוּחַ) is the breath given by God poured out on humans without

¹³ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974; repr., 2012)

¹⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000)

discrimination; it remains where God allows it to remain, which is God's action and becomes an opportunity given on earth. That human beings as *ruach* (רוּחַ) are alive, desire good, and act as subjects does not come from humans themselves, and *ruach* (רוּחַ) will eventually turn back to God (Ps 104:30).

Therefore, the will and decision of human beings, who have been given vitality by God and granted full authority as subjects, are called to become God's breath and activity of love on this earth. Humans with fragility exist within a circle of being embodied as God's breath in earthly history and returning to God.

1. Hebrews 11:1-3

- **Faith:** Participating into Reconciliation in an Open World

From an ecological perspective, Jeffrey S. Lamp interprets faith in Hebrews 11 as the basis for human connection toward the harmony in the covenantal relationship and as the participation in the fulfillment of the purpose of creation where God dwells. Together with the witnesses who have gone before us (the ancestors), the present community are invited to the eschatological hope (oneness). Heaven is not "a place for the afterlife," "a place separated," or "an invisible place" in contrast to some "visible place." Rather, it is the hope of union and reconciliation in our life here and now, a hope that has already "appeared" in this new relationality.¹⁵

Therefore, this union and reconciliation names a process of human and divine becoming within an open world – one that extends beyond the self to the neighbor, beyond humanity to the created order, and beyond the present moment to responsible relations with future generations.

- The Context around Hebrews 11

The earlier part of Hebrews witnesses that Jesus Christ is a "better covenant" and a "better hope." Here, Christ can be explained as the covenant and hope of union where the steps of pilgrims are connected to one another. Chapter 12, which follows the text, speaks of the encouragement of "a great cloud of witnesses (ancestors)" in our faith journey. Faith appears as the future fulfillment (union and reconciliation) that occurs through connection both contemporary and chronologically. Therefore,

¹⁵ Jeffrey S. Lamp, *Hebrews: An Earth Bible Commentary – A City That Cannot Be Shaken* (London: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2020)

faith is not a certainty or assurance given to individuals but a communal event and joyful participation in God's own will for completion.

Final Farewell

Our lives move through being born, living, and dying. We therefore live with the sense that the past is fixed and death is the end – yet faith tells a different story.

1. The traces of OOO's life remain in the memories we share, carrying the will and story of heaven. Because of OOO's life, heaven tells a unique story of how it has been revealed. Our faith does not end with an individual's death but becomes a new story of connection and reconciliation among us who still live and breathe—becoming breath once more.
2. If OOO's story is not yet complete, then we are those called to live out and bear witness to that hope. We participate in OOO's memory and, in the time given to us, seek to complete, reconcile, and unite OOO's story. The remaining chapters of OOO's life, received as breath in God's working love, have now become a story for us to carry forward together.
3. Now we remember and commemorate OOO. We also share in the breath of OOO, who shared in God's loving activity. This vision of faith invites us to live today in the hope of reconciliation and union. So, from the place where OOO's breath has ended, we lean on one another and encourage one another to live this day in hope.
4. Today faith invites us to join OOO's memories with our own, to let OOO's life be completed in our lives, and to be united together in that hope. Within this bond with OOO, we look toward reunion. Let us say farewell to OOO within the hope of seeing one another again, and within that beautiful hope of oneness.

SEE YOU!

After a Sudden or Unexpected Death

A sudden, unexpected death can cause deep shock and grief to the family and to those closest to the one who has died. It can be hard even to begin to accept what has happened. In many cases, the family will urgently need a range of practical and professional support in order to navigate unprepared legal, financial, and personal matters. If the deceased left no preparations at all, the burdens that remain may feel even heavier.

In all of this, the help of neighbors and the wider community is essential. Pastoral care and comfort begin by staying close, waiting nearby, and quietly helping to carry the weight of this time. The message offered should not be an attempt to defend God, but a witness that “we stand alongside those who weep,” encouraging shared lament and the solidarity of the community.

1. Romans 12:12-20

Can We Say that the Church Exists?

We have gathered carrying a sorrow too deep for words. Today, in this service, it is hard to speak of who God is. All we can do is stand before this tragedy that should never have happened. In this deep grief, we plead for the comfort of heaven. Over us, in our heart-rending lament and even in our resentment and questions, heaven stands open to hear our cries.

(1) Before such a sudden tragedy, we can hardly speak of God.

In the face of this accident, we cannot say whether God was or was not “there” at the scene. We cannot explain God’s will, and we cannot fully name the weight of the loss and pain this has brought. We do not know whether this sorrow will ever feel bearable.

(2) Yet in this place of pain, we have a chance to say what the church is.

What we can ask, from now on, is whether the church exists in our life. We can stay nearby, weep together, and help one another to stand again. We can resolve in our hearts to be a church that consistently upholds and supports those who walk through this loss. Perhaps, carrying the seed of heaven that we cherished in the one who has died, we may walk together and, in some way, share in

completing the unfinished span of their life.

(3) Let us be a church that weeps and holds one another.

As each of us learns to be a church, one day we will begin to know God nearby in the very community that has held one another up. Perhaps we will recognize the Lord who came among us, wept with us, and stayed with us in our sorrow.

But today, we simply weep together. And we will try to rise together. We will inscribe the remainder of OOO's life into our own. Though it will be hard, we will seek to go on together. May deep compassion and heartfelt sympathy surround the family and all of you. Today, if we can find even a little strength, you and I together may be able to say: the church is here. With all our hearts.

2. Lamentations 3:19-26

Waiting for Hope in Unbearable Despair

Lamentations is a collection of funeral laments or poems in the fall of Jerusalem (587/6 BCE). In the Sumerian city laments of the ancient Near East, the destruction of a city is often understood as divine punishment for the people's sins, and the poems move from devastation to a clear promise of rebuilding. Lamentations shares some formal similarities with those city laments, yet it is distinctive in that it refuses to resolve the story neatly; instead, it remains a sustained address of complaint and petition to God.

Jeremiah gives voice to a pain so deep that he seems to have lost even the will to live. He speaks of "my affliction and my homelessness, the wormwood and the gall," a bitterness that does not disappear but presses him down into ongoing despair. Yet in today's passage, we hear of a turning that begins at the very bottom. As Jeremiah "calls this to mind" in his heart, something shifts; precisely there, he begins to speak again of hope.

(1) Enough time is needed.

We read this text in a single breath, but for Jeremiah this change took time. Verse 19 shows that the events remain an unforgettable trauma, fixed in his memory.

Before the sorrow we are experiencing, let us not hurry ourselves or one another. Sufficient time is needed. Even do not measure that time. We may not be able to pull anyone out of the tunnel of grief. One thing we can do is wait beside them there.

(2) A light of hope begins to rise as we learn the Lord anew.

Much of Lamentations is filled with Jeremiah's anguish and with God's severe silence. Yet in the midst of that lament, Jeremiah slowly articulates the reason for hope that returns to him as he thinks things through.

It has to do with the character of God. As he remembers the Lord's steadfast love, compassion, and faithfulness that he has known, he begins to find a way where no way was visible and to recover a memory of hope. Jeremiah's confession is not only a private insight, but a communal recollection of who God is. Within the community, the steadfastness of those who bear the heart of Lord prepares the first light of hope for others.

(3) We find strength to walk on together, even before hope is fulfilled.

The light of hope has begun to shine in Jeremiah's heart, but its fulfillment has not yet come. If despair has come upon us in ways we never expected, then salvation too may come in ways we do not yet foresee.

Jeremiah sings this lament – not alone, but with the community. It is a shared song of lament and petition. And salvation will draw near quietly somewhere within the lives of those who walk and sing this song together.

On the path of waiting for the Lord and seeking the Lord, stories are born that make us a blessing to others. We continue to live with traumatic memories. Yet as our journey of waiting for and seeking God goes on, we ourselves become a source of blessing and hope for someone else. And one day, as we walk in this way, salvation will come to meet us – unexpectedly, right in the place where we never imagined it would.

When a Person Dies by Suicide

The death of any person is painful and heartbreaking, because it marks the end of that life's earthly journey. When a person dies by suicide, the shock and sorrow can be beyond words. For this reason, in such situations the church is called not first to judge by doctrinal or ethical standards, but to reflect on its pastoral calling to stand in solidarity and compassion with the one whose life has ended and with those whose lives remain deeply connected to them.

What we call "death by suicide" also takes many different forms. When a death occurs in the context of severe depression, panic disorder, or other significant mental illness, or as a result of adverse reactions to medication taken to treat such conditions, we must take seriously the psychological suffering and impaired judgment the person experienced. In such cases, this death cannot be reduced to a simple "personal choice" or "moral failure." Furthermore, when a person has been subjected to violence, bullying, social exclusion, or long-term neglect, their death bears the marks of a wider web of responsibility. In such situations, their death is deeply entangled with patterns of violence, exclusion, and structural injustice and therefore cannot be placed on the individual alone. Moreover, there are difficult questions raised by so-called "death with dignity (ref. Euthanasia; Aid in Dying)," in which a person, with clear intent, chooses the timing and manner of the end of life. Finally, in cases where death is chosen as a protest against injustice or as a testimony of innocence, the interpretation of that death will remain complex and will invite many different stories and responses. And in history, there have been those who have gone to their deaths in resistance to unjust social structures or in solidarity with their people in crisis – tragic decisions that still fall within the broken realities of our world. In real life, these situations do not fit neatly into separate categories but are often intertwined with many overlapping factors.

Therefore, rather than treating "suicide" as a single, uniform event, it is important to attend deeply to the circumstances that led to the person's death and to focus on the life they lived and the intentions and hopes they leave behind. At the same time, the shock and grief of family and friends – and the guilt many feel for not having been able to protect or save the one who died – call for very careful pastoral care.

Grounded in deep empathy for all that surrounds this death, the church's task is to remember and give thanks for the person's life, and to conduct the funeral in a way that is, as far as possible, like any other funeral. It is important to listen closely to the

wishes of the bereaved family regarding the liturgy and practical arrangements, to respect those wishes, and to care for their hearts so that they may sense God's presence with them. Suicide, then, is not a situation from which pastors should withdraw, but one in which the deepest pastoral solidarity is required.

If, during or after the service, anyone present is struggling with despair about their own life or is having suicidal thoughts, the pastor and the church have a responsibility to help connect that person with appropriate professional support – such as counseling, mental health services, or crisis resources.

Where appropriate, the service may also become an occasion for those present to reflect on life and death, and to be gently invited to seek help, to speak honestly about their pain, and to entrust themselves again to the God who is near to the brokenhearted.

1. 1 Kings 19:1-13

In 1 Kings 18 and 19, Elijah almost seems like two different people. In ch. 18, on Mount Carmel, Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal and wins a great victory. He appears as a prophet without apparent problems, a man on a clear and successful path.

But because of the jealousy and rage of Ahab and Jezebel, the Elijah we meet in ch. 19 is a fugitive, running for his life to Mount Horeb so as to escape death.

The hardest truth we must face and bear today is this: there is no way to bring our beloved back to life. And we must not respond by blaming or condemning the one who has died. If this death by suicide is also a social issue – if, in some sense, it bears the marks of social and structural failure – then what is the calling that falls to us as a Christian community?

For those whose daily lives feel like a wilderness, and for those who are suffering deeply, we are called to a more active and unconditional hospitality.

Human beings are easily absorbed by what is visible (the great wind, earthquake, and fire: growth, competition, and change). Sometimes we even assume, in a distorted way, that God's presence must always appear in such dramatic ways. But today's passage speaks of a very different kind of divine presence and nearness: "a gentle whisper, a still, small voice."

As we remember the deceased, one task remains with us: to notice that there may still be people around us who, like Elijah in this text, feel as if they have been left utterly alone.

The sorrow and pain of this parting will not disappear in a moment. This farewell will likely remain in our hearts as a bruise and a scar. The journey through this grief will be no easier than Elijah's walk through the wilderness. That is why, for today and for the days to come, we are invited to walk this road together, step by step.

2. Luke 18:31-34

Many of us hesitate to speak of death. Our humanity, however, cannot be meaningfully described without facing death. Today, as we stand before the untimely and devastating death of OOO, pondering the meaning of death which comes equally to all, we are invited to find ways to live out the stories OOO has left us with.

The passage from the Gospel of Luke is where, after telling several parables, Jesus once again foretells his suffering and death to his disciples. Luke shows us Jesus' firm resolve that he "must go to Jerusalem." For Jesus, Jerusalem is the place of death, and his steps are the steps of a will that freely walks toward death.

In this light, we may say that being human is not only about trying not to die, but also about the question of how we die. The death that waits for us in our most vulnerable and least controllable places frightens us and fills us with dread, misery, and sorrow. And yet this same death can also speak, in a profound way, of what is most genuine in our humanity.

1. In death, a person unmask the world.

The death of Jesus exposes what the world is. His death takes place not only through the power structures of religious and political leaders, but also through the zealous loyalty of Roman soldiers, the misdirected passion of the crowds, and the fearful withdrawal of those who stood by.

The world we live in has beauty, but it is also woven through with distortion and lies, with violence, discrimination, and indifference. In the midst of this confusion and darkness, Jesus reveals that this is a world in which the killing of the righteous does not cease.

2. In death, a person calls for solidarity.

Yet this death does not appear as a curse hurled at the world, commanding it only to be judged and destroyed. The story of Jesus' death raises questions in the hearts of people. The relationships created by these questions became the very birthplace of the first church. The first Christians gathered around the question, "Why did Jesus die?" In this way, a person's death exposes the world, and at the same time invites those who remain into the alienated and shadowed places of that world.

The suddenness of OOO's death lays bare our own frailty and the short reach of our hands, and that is something we rightly grieve. Yet at the same time, it conveys God's heart to us, urging us to take the hands of those who find themselves in situations like the one our beloved faced.

3. In death, a person narrates their life.

The meaning of Jesus' way was not brought to completion until his death was fulfilled. In death he brought his journey to its goal, and from the cross he could say, "It is finished."

Today, before the death of this beloved person, we are invited to look back over their life. As they leave our side, the stories and desires they carried in life remain with us, now weightier and more precious, as a part of who we are. In this way, we become joined to them, and they to us. And as we listen to the world they longed to help shape, we can begin to write that story forward together.

4. In death, a person summons life.

Jesus walked toward death, yet in doing so he offered life to many. Those who recognize the contradictions of the world in the place of his death step in to bear and mend that empty space caused by the absence of the righteous. Those who have seen the darkness there take up the light and carry it into that very place. In this way, Jesus handed himself over to death, but his death became an invitation into a work of greater life.

Today, the death of this beloved person calls our lives toward solidarity and cooperation. It calls us to step forward carrying the light. In this way, through their death, they kindle in us yet another light of life.

So today, as you and I remember the one who has returned to God's embrace, may we ponder deeply what kind of life and what kind of light we will live out. And may this become a story of hope, in which we remain connected to the one we now commend to God.

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