

"Three Services and Beyond"

If you open the book, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, in a search of basic patterns for certain worship occasions you probably miss a point lurking under its liturgy. Three ritualistic services come in order and are arranged in a way of reflecting human life: "The Baptismal Covenant," "Christian Marriage," and "Services of Death and Resurrection."

They've been there forever since published, waiting to serve commemorative days, but their intentional arrangement wasn't paid much attention. How remarkably those three services would be employed to mark our life journey that takes twinkling moments? How a human life could be summed up in a few pages of liturgical formats? "How amazing is our life anyway mingled with God? Yes, we are baptized, get married, and die. Some are somewhere between the baptismal font and the marriage license. Others are living out their adulthood somewhere between a house and a casket. Human life is simply marked by those three great days. And God is there always.

Quite a few years ago, at one of the marriage rehearsals, I mistakenly called "marriage" - a "funeral". Due to the fact that funeral liturgy was adjacent to marriage one (yea, it is true in human life, too!) and the succession of a series of funerals, I unwittingly repeated the same mistake. They should/could not be interchangeable. One is bright and the other is dark. One is blossoming and the other is dead cold winter. I, of course, expressed my apology to the would-be bride and groom over the mistakes I made. The thing I really wished to tell them was this: "Hey, marriage isn't far from the other liturgy as in the liturgical book. They are two sides of one coin of life."

There are always pretty good chances for pastors to attend all those three services in a day. Differing groups of people filling the same worship space are overlapped and joys and giggling are preceded by grief and sorrow. It verifies that one follows the other right away like three services next to one another in a rubric. Three services and we are gone! Crying, laughing, and sleeping. Water, flower, and dirt...

As we are in the intersection of summer and fall, our hearts begin to yearn for eternity beyond the summer joys.

The anonymous writer of Ecclesiastes argues like this: "*Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young, before the years take their toll and your vigor wanes, before your vision dims and the world blurs and the winter years keep you close to the fire. . . . Yes, you're well on your way to eternal rest, while your friends make plans for your funeral. Life, lovely while it lasts, is soon over. Life as we know it, precious and beautiful, ends. The body is put back in the same ground it came from. The spirit returns to God, who first breathed it. It's all smoke, nothing but smoke. The Quester says that everything's smoke.*" (Ecc. 12: 1-8)

"Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young," it says.

Blessings in Christ...

the Rev. Dr. Woojae Im