

Protagonist Corner

Our Baby Died

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Shortly after midnight on Easter Sunday, 1988, our baby died. In the darkness, away from the world and away from God, we were in Hell. There must have been light, but to us all was deep darkness. The operating room was surreal, strangely muffled noises and mumbling, nurses who seemed shadows, masks, chrome tools of unknown use. Inside was fire.

God had abandoned us on the day we celebrate His redemption of our souls. God, the omnipotent, whose love for us is beyond our understanding, had let our baby die. Our prayers were sincere. We trusted the Lord of the universe to let our innocent baby live. There are no words to describe the loneliness we felt. Miriam and I had only each other and great pain in our world. We were alone.

You will come on this situation. First you will have to be a pastor and then a preacher. No one can know what this is like unless they have experienced it. It is unnatural, not in the order of things.

Our pastor had about the same lead time as we did, a day or so. He had no script. He preached the most eloquent sermon I have ever heard early the next morning. "God understands, He also lost a child." Seven words, three seconds, a profound sermon, extraordinary pastoral care. Our pastor also had the courage to stay when our baby, Heather Ruth, was brought in. He did not shy from touching her cold body. The gesture was sacramental. We joined hands and prayed.

That was our first worship service. It was spontaneous and inspired. This impromptu service made a profound difference in the course of my subsequent spiritual life. You cannot prepare for this nor should you. It worked because our pastor was the willing tool of a loving God.

The public service was more formally planned. Later in the day, I opened the Bible to Psalm 139.

You created every part of me;
You put me together in my mother's womb.

I praise You because You are to be feared;
All You do is strange and wonderful.

I know it with all my heart.

When my bones were being formed,
Carefully put together in my mother's womb,
When I was growing there in secret,
You knew that I was there,
You saw me before I was born.

The days allotted to me
Had all been recorded in Your book,
Before any of them ever began.

O God, how difficult I find Your thoughts.

Miriam and I began to try to make some sense of our tragedy and began to think of whether to have a service for Heather. She was born at five months. To many people this is a late miscarriage. To us she was a real person, brief as her life was. When real people die, they are mourned and have funerals.

I imagine that some people in their private hearts questioned the propriety of having a service for what they considered just a fetus. She was born four months too soon. We decided to do it. As we thanked God for Heather's brief life, we stated to the world that she was a real person, worthy of our love and worthy of God's love.

We found that many people had stories similar to ours. The common strain, however, was that they had not been allowed to mourn. There was no service to mark the life and death of their babies. Worship, that day, was more than just Heather's service.

Worship services have many functions in a time of crisis. This service saved our faith. It allowed us and others to mourn our losses. It reminded us that God is love when there was so much to suggest otherwise. It allowed our brothers and sisters a way to say that they were sorry and that they cared during a situation unfamiliar and uncomfortable to them. It gave us an opportunity to worship God when we desperately needed to do so.