
MEMORIAL SERVICE

A Ceremony At The Place Of a Tragic Death

Where a body has been found
or
Where a person has been murdered

by Michael Bausch

GATHERING AND OPENING WORDS

We have been called together because we have all come face to face with the gruesome reality of a young woman's murder. We are here to share our feelings about this terrible thing, and to ask God's redemption of this piece of land that has been defiled by unnatural death.

THE SHARING OF FEELINGS

(Offer all persons a chance to say their feelings about this place, the victim, the perpetrator, their concerns for their families, the violence that has been brought to this peaceful area.)

In times such as these, we often turn to scripture for guidance and assistance.

GENESIS 4:8-10 reminds us that since the beginning of creation, human beings have sinned against one another:

"Cain said to Abel, his brother, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' And the Lord said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.'"

We are reminded that while killing and the spilling of blood occur, God hears the cry of that blood from the ground, and God has marked the killer for judgment.

In Numbers 35: 29-34, we read,

"You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land...You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people..."

And in the 21st chapter of Deuteronomy, provision is made for just such an occurrence as this:

"If in the land which the Lord your God gives you to possess, any one is found slain, lying in the open country, and it is not known who killed (her), then your elders and your judges shall come forth...and shall wash their hands...and they shall testify, 'our hands did not shed this blood, neither did our eye see it shed. Forgive, O Lord, thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and set not the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of the people Israel; but let the guilt of blood be forgiven them. So you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord.'"

By our very lives, in living and doing right, we purge the guilt of the innocent blood shed here. By your living rightly with one another, with your families and neighbors, with your world, you redeem what has happened here.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF SYMBOLS:

(Have a large basin of water and a towel present. Pass the basin of water and ask people to wash their hands in the basin, and then to dry them with the towel. Persons pass the basin and towel along until each one has had the chance to wash.)

(A wreath, or flowers, or a cross, or other religious symbol may be placed upon the site. In the case of a rural setting, flowers may be planted, or seeds of hope planted at the site.)

PRAYERS

(Ask people to pray together, offering silent and spoken prayers.)

FINAL WORDS:

May we leave this place now with some peace in our hearts, with the knowledge that God has shown us ways to right living: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. May we in the living of our lives resist evil and live into the harmony and goodwill God intends for our world, Amen.

(Possibly adjourn for food at a restaurant or nearby home.)†

This basic service was developed by Rev. Michael Bausch, minister of Union-Congregational Church, Waupun, Wisconsin, and first used at the site of the discovery of Ms. Berit Beckes' body, August 26, 1990.