



ST AGNES
LONGSIGHT

Pastoral Care & Nurture: Bereavement

4. Coping through ceremonies and rituals

Bereavement is one of the most difficult emotions we face – therefore we cope by developing mechanisms, rituals, ceremonies.

These ceremonies have developed in to a social code of things which 'have' to be done.

Feelings and words

- adequate words – hard to find – 'lost for words'
- when words are difficult we use other means – rituals

Features of Grieving Rituals

at time of death

- hushed voices
- creeping around quietly
- last rites
- special language (the deceased, the late)
- neighbours call in
- sympathy cards

at funeral

- dark clothes
- drawn curtains
- flowers, wreaths
- slow drive to the funeral
- refreshments after funeral
- gathering of friends and family
- familiar hymns
- committal
- rituals from bodies (eg Legion, armed forces, societies etc)
- mound of flowers
- corporate singing

later

- burial of ashes
- planting a rose bush
- headstone/memorial
- book of remembrance
- thank you letters

practical things

- sorting out clothes
- clearing household effects

How does ritual help?

moves forward, provides signposts in the grieving process

eg: the legal and practical process of arranging funeral/registering death etc can actually help to get through the crisis.

Ritual and Religion

ritualistic processes will help all people, but religious people have an 'added' layer of ritual meaning

a prayer at the funeral will be simply a process or ritual for a non-church person ('doing the right thing') but for a believer it will also be a way of actually speaking to and listening to God.

Private Rituals

- may be less obvious or may be peculiar to the individual
- they are a way of creating order in a time of emotional chaos
- sometimes they may be a way of trying to placate the dead

inappropriate ritual – either too little or too much mourning

After the public rituals are over

- Support (emotional and practical – from family, neighbours, friends – months or years)
- Memory (encouraging memory of the dead person – photos, mementos, places etc)
- Expression (of feelings, in private or in presence of trusted friends)

For meditation

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep.

John 11.32-35