

It's been a while since I attended a funeral but this last week, I went to two. The first was for a 94-year-old man, Don, who had lived a full and fulfilling life, close to 70 of those years with the love of his life. And he'd gotten to see his two boys grow to manhood with interesting lives of their own.

The second funeral was tragically different. This man, Matt, had only made it to 38 before a very aggressive colon cancer claimed him. He had just received his master's degree last May. He and the love of *his* life had only had slightly over 5 years together as husband and wife and their twin boys had just turned one this past Christmas. It still makes me a little sick to my stomach just thinking about the injustice of it all. Not that I begrudge Don any of his almost century of lived experiences. Far from it! But why, oh why, was Matt so deprived of them? Why will his two boys never really know their dad and why must his wife now have to carry on, alone, this project of parenthood they had barely begun together?

It's pointless to ask such questions, in that they won't change anything, not for Matt and his family nor anyone else in the future subjected to such a seemingly capricious turn of fate. But maybe they aren't pointless to consider in that they yank into full focus just how out-of-our-hands much of life really is. It's times like these that often make us appreciate more deeply our loved ones and the hands of good fortune we may have been dealt from time to time.



And that's not insignificant.

It's also made me wonder if I'm living my best life. Hearing the heartfelt (and well deserved) accolades lavished upon both Don and Matt—the ways that they had made the world a better place—got me wondering what people might say about me at my funeral. Have I made the world a better place?

I'm leaving in a few days to go be with my dad who is on his way out of this life and this world. One of the things on our to-do list is to talk about his funeral. We've already had some informal conversations around this, particularly the "message" he wants proclaimed, both at his funeral and in his obituary. It's not completely crafted yet but it's along the lines of "Do what Jesus told us to do." One of his favorite descriptors when critiquing Christianity is "Hocus Pocus Christianity" where, if you say all the right words (i.e. beliefs, dogmas, doctrines), you'll go to heaven.

He's not at all interested in heaven! He's all about this life NOW, on earth, and the things that are in his control. And as a follower of Jesus, he thinks the biggest thing that's in his control is

actually *doing* what Jesus told his followers to do: love our enemies, feed the hungry, visit the sick ... you know the drill. Dad even goes so far as to say, "Jesus never said worship me. So why do we spend at least an hour every week sitting on our butts worshipping him? That's an hour we could actually be out DOING one of the things he DID tell us to do." (And yet, until he got sick, he was in church worshipping every week!)

Dad's social gospel theology has definitely rubbed off on me. I, too, am not interested in what happens to us after we die. I'm much more committed to actions than words (the words of the biblical stories I tell being the exception, of course!). So, am I currently living my life in a way where my actions speak louder than my words? How well am I doing what Jesus instructed us to do? What will be the lasting impact of my life, the kind of impact that will manifest in the words spoken at my funeral? What's the message I'd like proclaimed?

I think it boils down to a conversation I had with a friend years ago. She'd been talking to a friend of hers about their frustrations with the Church. They allowed themselves to dream of alternative possibilities. If they started their own church, what would they call it? They decided on the "Don't Be a Dick" church. That's it. Every sermon, every programmatic offering, every outreach opportunity would basically be a reminder to not be a dick. Of course, the more delicate way to say that is: Be kind; love others; show compassion. Period.

This is basically what my dad has attempted throughout his life. He hasn't always succeeded, of course; he is human after all. (And, I kid you not, his name just happens to be Dick!) But he's been successful enough to have impacted my own faith journey.

I definitely haven't always succeeded either, and these two recent funerals have been a stark reminder of that. The lives that Don and Matt led were shining examples of following Jesus' example as well as the expectations for those calling themselves his followers. I am grateful for the positive, Christlike impact they had on the world, and I will recommit myself to doing better myself. But first, I need a little more time simply to grieve, attending to my broken heart and to my upset stomach.