

## **All good things must come to an end?**

Mark 16:1-8

April 12, 2009

All good things must come to an end. The moment is celebrated, we taste its sweetness, and then it slips away, into the past, out of our reach, held fast only in memory.

A beautiful song. A birthday party. A summer day.

The fragrance of a rose in bloom. The companionship of a good dog. The favorite dish you always order when you go out to eat at your favorite restaurant. An ice cream cone. All good things must come to an end.

Your youth. Your children's childhood. The good life you have been privileged to share with your spouse. Your own life. All good things must come to an end.

It is wisdom to understand that. It is wisdom to appreciate fully life's fragility, its impermanence, its brevity. When we understand how short life is, we cherish it all the more. We learn to value every moment. We learn to be grateful for every moment. We learn to make good use of every moment.

And we learn not to try -- foolishly and hopelessly and tragically -- not to try to hold on to what we cannot hold on to. We learn how to go on when the good things in our lives have gone on.

Some even say that it is life's shortness itself, its very impermanence, that makes it sweet, that a thing is beautiful because it is fragile, because it is elusive, that if we could hang on to it, keep it as it is, forever, we would find it less attractive.

But I don't think so! There are songs I have heard that I could listen to again and again and again and never tire of hearing. There are words that have been spoken to me -- *I love you* -- that could not possibly become any less powerful or any less dear to my soul, however many times they might be said to me! And there have been moments in my life when I have truly thought: *If I could stay here, if I could stay in this moment, forever ...*

But, of course, I couldn't stay there. I couldn't stay in that moment, forever, because all good things must come to an end.

Don't they?

Jesus was a good thing! Look at him! He was a man of stunning mercy: forgiving even the enemies who hated him, reaching out to people despised and rejected by everybody else, touching the untouchables, forgiving the unforgivables.

He was a man of uncanny wisdom. Smart men laid cunning traps to catch him, to put him in a no-win situation, posing him questions with no good answer or with no answer that would allow him to stay on message without offending somebody or incriminating himself. But he eluded their traps. He stumped them with his answers, not by arguing with them or rebutting their claims, but, somehow, by changing the direction of the conversation entirely, by making them see their own questions, see the people around them, in a whole new way.

Jesus balanced truth and grace in a way no one else has. He was graceful without compromising truth or morality. And he was faithful to the truth -- God's truth, God's way -- without being heavy-handed or judgmental or patronizing. The truth he spoke was love, and the love he offered pointed to the truth.

He was a man of deep compassion: for sick people, grieving people, oppressed people, poor people, lost people, lonely people.

He was a man of astonishing vision, seeing the world as it could be, as he said it would be, showing us by what he said and did what a world at peace looks like, a world built on unrestrained love of God and uninhibited love of ... whoever happens to be your neighbor.

And the way he talked about God! Not like the philosophers or theologians or preachers, but like ... like he knew him! Like he knew this awesome, living, loving, inviting, glorious, embracing God!

Jesus was a good man. He lived a good life. He was a good teacher. He made us a good example. He was ...

Can't we say more? Don't we have to say more? Can't we say that he was a man who bore the image of God like no other? But even that doesn't say it! Can't we say he was the image of God? Can't we say he was ... the Son of God? God's only Son, an obedient son, a faithful son, a good son?

But all good things must come to an end.

Mary Magdalene and Salome and Mary, James' mother, understood that. They understood it all too well. They had stood by Jesus all through the terrible ordeal of his arrest and trial and execution, not abandoning him, not denying him, like so many of the others.

Perhaps, because they were women, they posed little threat to the powers that be, Roman or Jewish. Perhaps they could be open and bold about their love for Jesus because they ran less risk of prosecution or persecution.

But, in any case, they stood by him, literally. They watched him die. They stayed to the bitter end. And, of course, the end did come ... because all good things, even the life of this good man, must come to an end!

When things do come to an end, you hold on to what you have. You do what you can do. You hold on to the memories. You retell the stories. You perform the rituals of remembrance and letting go. You hold the memorial services. You set up the monuments. You assemble the scrapbooks. You gather the spices.

You gather the spices with which to anoint his body, to do honor to his lifeless body, to give it the proper and fitting burial that he deserves.

So they came to the tomb, these three women, adorned with the dignity of grief, clinging to the solace of memory. But they left almost as soon as they arrived, running and distressed and terrified! Distressed and terrified because they did not find what they expected to find. They did not find ... him.

Instead, they were told -- they were told a thing they could not fathom, a thing impossible to imagine, a thing impossible to believe. Because they knew as we all know: all good things must come to an end!