

Memorial Day weekend recalls the people who gave up their lives in armed conflict because they believed in peace and freedom. It reminds us that our quality of life comes at a tremendous cost, the cost of many people who loved us to death, even though they never knew us. My father served in the army in World War II. He never talked much about those years, but he could still remember the names of friends he lost and would never see again. It takes a real love for your country to serve in the armed forces.

Jesus got that kind of love from his disciples, but not until he died. During his life, the disciples were not very brave and not very bright. After the resurrection he appeared to them and strengthened their faith. Then he ascended into heaven – the event we remember today – and he sent the Holy Spirit upon them – the event we celebrate next weekend. The disciples spread the gospel, but at a cost: many of them put themselves in harm's way because they believed in Jesus, and they loved us to death, even though they never knew us.

The conclusion of Mark's gospel is one of the most debated passages in the New Testament. Scholars say it is almost certainly not from Mark's own hand. If you were listening to a song by Frank Sinatra, but heard at the end two lines from the Jonas Brothers, you would know someone had tinkered with the music. Experts say this ending of Mark's gospel just doesn't fit the style of the rest of it, and that it was probably written a few decades later. The original ending of Mark's gospel is quite mysterious. It takes place at the tomb when the women arrive. An angel appears. He instructs the women to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has been raised and will meet them in Galilee. Good enough so far. But then, the very last verse of the original version of Mark's gospel says this: "The women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." The end. One theory is that Mark couldn't possibly have ended the gospel this way; he must have had another page that somehow got lost. So a few decades later, based on the endings of the other gospels, somebody added this one. Another theory is that Mark knew exactly what he was doing. He ended the gospel in a way that makes the reader go, "Wait a minute. If the women didn't tell anybody about Jesus, then who does?" Um-hum. That would be you; that would be me.

Mark expected us to tell people about the gospel, and to be ready to tell it with our lives. Events this week have shown that Christians must raise our voices in the public square. The debate on abortion reached the campus of a Catholic University. The State of Missouri reinstated capital punishment. The abuse of children by religious in Ireland became public. On Memorial Day, we remember people who cared enough about their principles to put them on the line for others. Before his Ascension, Jesus gave this charge to his disciples: "go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." That we must do, taking every opportunity we have to profess our faith, to proclaim the value of every human life, to love all human beings, even those we do not know, and to love them to death.