

Giving It All
Jessica Wiggins Funeral Sermon
Psalm 23
2 Timothy 4:6-8
February 11, 2012

Dear friends who are loved by Jesus, grace and peace from the Lord of Love. Amen.

I can't believe it. *We* can't believe it. It just doesn't seem right. It doesn't seem fair. How can it be that someone in the prime of life has experienced so much suffering, and now is no longer with us?

It is likely that all of these thoughts and phrases have crossed our minds or our lips at some point or another in the last year and a half. It just doesn't seem right. But not even these expressions of unfairness get at the depth of loss and grief we feel today.

It is not right that Jess' parents, Darrel and Vesta, gather to bury a daughter they were so proud of. It is not right that Jess' children, Isabella, Sam and Olivia, have so many experiences ahead of them they will not share with their mom at their side. It is not right that John, as a loving husband and constant companion for over 25 years, faces the future without his beloved.

On any given day, we can name all the general things in this world that aren't right, but when it is this personal and strikes this close to home, it somehow comes into focus in a different way.

Jess was not one to dwell on the unfairness of her situation too often. She made us all wonder in other ways, "How can this be?" How can it be that someone can work so hard and be so determined, in just about anything she did in life? How can it be that she could find the tiniest speck of dirt in the blink of an eye? How can it be that she got away with asking all of the questions she did? How can it be that she invested so fully in all the people in her life?

More than any of these questions, this last one leaves us perplexed and amazed. Her deep and wide relationships with people stemmed from her identity as a child of God. Her care for people was how she expressed what she believed about her God. Her love and care was rooted in the love and care she trusted in from God. And because she allowed this love to motivate her, she was so willing to reach out to others.

This past Thanksgiving, as cancer was getting the upper hand on Jess, she made a bold move that made people wonder again, "How can this be?" In fact, anyone weaker willed than her, probably wouldn't have dared to think it.

She and John decided that they would host Thanksgiving at their house...for 67 family members. It was going to be the feast of feasts and the party of parties. And if you knew anything about Jess, you knew she would do it right.

The invitations went out. And a request that if you liked wine, bring a bottle and a bottle to share. She arranged to get matching china settings for each of the meticulously decorated tables. She even ensured that the littlest ones at the gathering had mini wine glasses at their places. Not a detail went missing. In this one event she got to give all she had to the things and the people she loved most.

She got to plan. She got to shop. She got to clean. I'm sure some cleaning orders were given to John, Isabella, Sam and Olivia to do their part too; which from all indications, Jess took some pleasure in doing also. She got to decorate. And most importantly, she got to spend time with her family. This feast gave her an opportunity to ask lots of questions about her loved ones'. She was curious about what was going on in their lives. And she genuinely cared how people were.

When the day came, everything was set, and everything was beautiful. She gave it her all. Psalm 23 famously says that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. This was a day where she set an abundant table before her loved ones in the presence of her cancer. As if to say, "I have one good race in me yet. Just watch." She gave it all she had and it was spectacular. It was just who she was. Her determination and perseverance was not born out of weakness or need to prove something, it was born out of strength and a confidence of knowing who she was and to whom she belonged.

It's safe to say that "Give it all ya got" was a personal mission statement of Jessica's. Whether it was being a co-worker, a wife, a mom, a sister, a daughter or a friend; it was all or nothing. Everything entrusted to her she cared for and stewarded with care and a commitment to make better. She poured her life out in love to family and friends. One of my favorite bands, called Mumford and Sons has a line in one of their songs that goes, "In these bodies we will live. In these bodies we will die. Where you invest your love, you invest your life." Jess invested her love and life in others.

Her time with us was far too short, yet as her life here was drawing to a close, we knew and she knew that she had fought the good fight. She had given it all she had. She had finished the race. She had kept the faith. And waiting in store for her was Jesus to welcome her home and right all the wrongs we feel in our heavy hearts today. We can almost hear a voice from heaven greeting her with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness."

Jess' family talked this week about all the little glimpses of heaven that they've seen along this journey with her. And that's what we hold onto and look forward to in times

like these, glimpses of God breaking into our lives with little shards of heaven, moments when we can see that the wrongs we experience will be made right again, times when we remember that we too are formed and shaped by a God of love who weeps and walks with us when life is difficult and the pain of grief cuts deep. We hope for the day when God will join us again with Jessica and all the saints to feast in paradise forever. In the meantime, we can live as Jessica lived, giving it all we've got and experiencing life lived to the fullest. Amen.