**A Good Word for Ilean Wilson
September 25, 2016**

 The way that Ilean smiled that caused a twinkle in her eye – that’s simply the best – and pretty much sums up who Ilean Wilson was. That twinkle-eyed smile revealed her gentleness and goodness and quiet sweetness that was her life. It seems to me when folks say something like “you know, she never had a bad word to say about anyone” – well, they are describing someone like Ilean Wilson. And so as I speak this Good Word for Ilean, you can rest assured that good words are all I have for her.

 At church you would find her always . . . here. Faithful as the day is long. And you could count on her to be an angel in Tableau or working in the kitchen with meals and receptions. She helped make the angel outfits and the screens to cover the heavenly host of angels that hovered above the shepherds who kept watch o’er their flock by night. But most of all – and from a pastor’s perspective most important of all – she was just always here. She loved to tell me how much she loved living close to the church. You know she would follow Al just about anywhere he wanted to go and one place he wanted to go was way out in the country. He wanted to get away from town and in a place where he could have room for a garden, so they found a place way way out in the boonies – way out just on the other side of 51 – and they made a new home there. But Ilean hated leaving the closeness of church. But I can’t really see how that long journey affected their attendance and activity at all. Al and Ilean – faithful as the day is long. I’ve long loved that Ilean shared a birthday with Park Road Baptist Church. Twenty-nine years to the day before Park Road held its first service, Ilean Wilson was born. December 10th stands as a good good day. The birth of a good woman and a good church, and that good woman helped to make this the good church that it was and continues to be. Thanks be to God for faithful servants like Ilean Wilson.

 It is my observation, and the family concurred, that in many ways Al brought Ilean to life. Oh, don’t get me wrong. She had plenty of feisty in her. She was the disciplinarian. She was the one that could cut the switch in a minute and wear Keith out when he needed it. She could sweep a broom down to its nub and she kept herself busy picking up sticks in the yard. She grew up on a tobacco farm and knew the hard labor that comes with that kind of work. And Al may have had his garden, but who do you think did all the canning and putting up and giving away? He probably got more of the glory and she got the behind the scenes dishwashing. But I’m guessing that’s the way she liked it and wouldn’t have wanted it any other way. There would be moments when she would finally have to declare – no more produce in the house. Ilean came from a large family and worked at Woolworths before she married Al. She played the guitar and banjo and made afghans. She picked strawberries and made the best bread around. So let me be clear – she was her own person and was a hard worker and was industrious in her own right. But it seems to me that Al brought her to life. He won her over with his letter writing campaign from the war of a letter every other day. She was actually writing to 2 other military men, but it was finally Al that won her heart because his writing was “so sincere, so honest, so caring” – her words.

 Ilean was a homebody. Never much on travelling. But Al had more of an adventuresome spirit. They lived in Florida and Delaware and Bermuda. And if she would have let him, they would have probably retired to Hawaii. She followed him just about anywhere he wanted to go, often bringing the grandchildren along for the adventure. (“Grams” seems to me to be that lovely quintessential grandmother that we all long to have.) Al loved to travel, and she loved to keep him happy. So my guess is he allowed her to see more of the world than she would have ever seen without him, and she created a sense of home and family that was a source of comfort and strength for him for all of their days together. I’d call that a pretty good match. And in thinking on the life of Ilean Wilson, I’m reminded that it was almost as if they were a package deal and without him for the last 6 years, she just wasn’t quite whole. And even though her mind might not have been quite as sharp as it once was, she still had her gentle spirit and twinkle-eyed smile. One does not need to remember everything perfectly to be who they are. And she never lost that Virginia accent – house and about – you could always hear her raising that must have also included lessons in kindness and honesty and gentleness.

 Both Ilean and Al came from large families. And while the family they created was not a house filled with children, they instead filled their house with all the love they had for one. And together, the three of them made a family that in her end is multiplying by leaps and bounds! Oh the twinkle in Gram’s eye about that! But Keith and Kim, her caregivers, and close church friends that have been her source of comfort and company and care, let me say *Well done, good and faithful servants.* Thank you for all the ways that you offered her the goodness of life that she so well deserved.

 Whenever we meet with a family, we always ask them if they only got one word to describe their loved one, what would their one word be? The first word out of this family’s mouth was “Saint.” And I’m pretty sure the only person that would not have agreed with that assessment would have been Ilean. Which must mean that it’s true. I looked up the proper definition of Saint and it said: *a person acknowledged as holy or virtuous and typically regarded as being in heaven after death.* Yes indeed, Saint seems to fit just right. Holy and virtuous and currently enjoying the Blessed Hope of the Forever Presence of God.

 I can’t help but wonder if the canning has already begun as the tomatoes are surely ripe and ready. For Ilean Wilson – thanks be to God.

II Corinthians 5

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

I Thessalonians 4.13-18

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Galatians 5.22-23

**22**By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, **23**gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.