***A Good Word for Mary Alice Doster***

I hope it’s OK today, in front of Mary Alice’s family and my own wife, to say that I kind of thought of Mary Alice Doster as my 100-year-old girlfriend! Nothing inappropriate of course, but I always felt an affection for and from her, from the very beginning. I had taken this, kind of as a matter of pride, until this week when Regina said matter-of-factly, “You know, Mama just loved men. All men!” It burst my bubble just a little. I thought we had something special!

From the very beginning, just about every single time I saw her, at church, or when I visited her at home, she told me that she loved me, with a twinkle in her eye and a little bit of a flirty smile. It was the last thing she said to me this past Sunday. “I love you, Russ. Tell everybody I love them. I love you.”

She used to come to my Tuesday morning Bible study, and though it’s mostly senior adult women this is not what you might think of as a little old ladies Sweet Jesus Bible study. We’ve gotten into some pretty deep stuff. I don’t ever hold back in our topics and discussions. Mary Alice… did not always agree with me. And, she would let me know it! But then at the end of the day, she’d say, “I love you.”

About the second year we were here I ran into Mary Alice on campus somewhere during the week. In those days I wore a suit to work every day, but whatever I’d been doing that day had brought me to church in blue jeans, so I showed up, dressed-down, and I apologized for my appearance. But Mary Alice, with that little twinkle in her eye, looked at me and said, “Russ, you just be you. OK? You just be you!”

So we didn’t always agree on things, but Mary Alice always let me be me, and I always let her be her, and her last word to me will be the most important word. I loved Mary Alice Doster. Thank you Mary Alice, for loving me too!

Two texts of scripture came to mind for today. The first is from Psalm 90, a song of Israel regarding “God’s eternity and human frailty”:

*1 Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

*3 You turn us back to dust, and say, ‘Turn back, you mortals.’ 4 For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. 5 You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; 6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. . .*

*10 The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. . .*

*12 So teach us to [number] our days that we may gain a wise heart.*

*14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. . .17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands – O prosper the work of our hands*!

And then that beautiful text from Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, that so-called “love chapter.”

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. [Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love*.

For Mary Alice Doster, who numbered her days wisely, and got more than her fair share of years out of this life, and for the love she gave in her century of living, thanks be to God!