**A Good Word for Frances Welsh
October 15, 2016**

 Courageous. It was almost the first word out of the mouth of her daughters when I said, “Tell me about Frances.” From a childhood in an orphanage to marrying a man who four days later would move to Nebraska for military training, Frances proved herself to be a courageous woman. She was a bit of the little mother to the other children in the orphanage and not long after Steve left for Nebraska, Frances boarded a train to visit him and just stayed. She got a job at the newspaper, and they started a life together. And what a life they built. Four children – 3 girls and finally that beloved boy – and they shared life together that included trips to the beach and to the mountains. A trip to Florida and to Washington, D.C. and then there was always Freedom Park in May. But morning by morning, she would wake the children by opening the blinds and singing a song to welcome the sunshine in. She loved the sunshine. Frances had a way of finding Joy. Perhaps that starts by welcoming the sunshine in. But it wasn’t just nature that received a warm welcome, Frances made her home one of hospitality. Everyone was always made to feel welcome – from friends of the children until later the in-laws – as we like to sing at church – “All are Welcome in this place!” was surely Frances’s motto. And what welcoming home is complete without fried chicken and macaroni and cheese and slaw and sweet iced tea. It was her joy to provide a table full of food and then for everyone to remain at the table to talk.

 She loved to plant and tend the flowers, she loved to sit on their deck, she loved to listen to and watch the birds, she loved to read books with positive message and health books, and she loved to write. And apparently she was quite the gifted writer. Her writings in the form of journals reflected goodness. Someone said she could have written the narrative for The Waltons. I love that. She even received an award in high school for her writing abilities. And she was always entering and trying to win jingle contests.

 But of all the things she loved, it seems like children win the day. Children were dear to her and she spent a lot of her service at Park Road Baptist Church as Superintendent of the Children’s Department. She wasn’t fussy and didn’t mind of children made a mess. And she loved the babies. I wonder if her life growing up, that she recalled fondly, was so full of children who basically only had each other that it led her to become the woman who was so drawn to children. I think she saw her job as taking care of people and in so doing she asked so little for herself.

 Church was the hub of their social life. Steve and Frances saw to it to raise their family together in the church and in 1950, they were a part of the charter of this church. Founding members. There aren’t many left. They started in the Park Road Elementary School and then moved to the Hut and then to the Youth Building and then to what is now the Chapel and finally into this sanctuary. And their hands, their lives, their hearts are all over the place around here. Though in most of our time here as Pastors their health kept them from that same level of activity, I do believe they always loved this place and what it meant to their growing family during such formative years for them all. Frances was often the Head Angel in Tableau. Perhaps that’s what started her collection of angels and her belief that one guarded her safely. Her faith was quiet and reverent. Perhaps that is the kind of faith that leads one to live out of a sense of resilience over resentment. Perhaps that is the kind of faith that leads one to always see a silver lining. Perhaps that is the kind of faith that leads one to take risks and trust that all would work out. Perhaps that is the kind of faith that keeps dreams alive. Perhaps that is the kind of faith that leads a mother to always be a cheerleader for all of her children.

 And so I’ve told you about who Frances was and the things that were important to her. But I learned more about Frances than any daughters could ever tell me simply by watching them help her to die. All of them. Sandy, Kay, Carol, and Steve – watching you care for her both up close and from afar told me more about Frances Welsh than I learned from the pages of notes of took while you talked to me about her. Because I watched you love her the way she surely must have loved you. I watched you tell stories. I watched you remember well. I watched you learn to care for a dying body just as surely she must have had to learn how to care for a newborn baby when each of you was born. I watched you tenderly hold her hand. I watched you treat her with dignity. I watched you laugh, and I watched you cry. I watched you help her go gently into a new life. I watched you let her go with grace and dignity and love just as surely that was how she brought each of you into this world and how she raised you in this world. In all my years, I don’t think I’ve ever seen more tenderness anywhere than I saw at her bedside for the last week. So, *Well Done, Good and Faithful Servants –* you ushered her into the freedom for which she yearned just like she taught you to do.

I sing because I'm happy;
I sing because I'm free;
His eye is on the sparrow
And I know He watches me.

Let not your heart be troubled; these tender words I hear;
And resting on his goodness I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth but one step I may see;
His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.
His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.

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 In those dying days, I sang more than I’ve sung in ages. Sandy and Kay assumed this is my normal thing for the dying. It is not. I almost never do. But they kept asking, and I kept singing and there were moments it was like a bad version of Name That Tune. The window was open – to let the breeze and the Blessed Sunshine in. And they asked for His Eye is on the Sparrow. And by the time I got to the peppy chorus, the birds chirped so loudly we all looked at each other in amazement. We had not heard one bird with any of the other songs, but when we put our eye on the sparrow, the sparrow performed beautifully. And so I imagine heaven today to be filled with sunshine and birds singing, and we rest in the Blessed Hope that Frances is Free. For the good good life of Frances Welsh, Thanks be to God! May it be so.