**A Good Word for Louise Singleton
November 10, 2009**

 When I sat down with the family to discuss this service, Louise’s death was almost too fresh. Barely four hours after Louise breathed her last breath, I was sitting in a corner booth of a restaurant with Will and Olivia, Ashley, Charles and Barbara. Because of my tight schedule for getting to meet with the family, I found myself too soon asking those questions that I always ask: what are your fondest memories, how would you describe your mother/sister, what were her passions and her hobbies. Oh, they answered well enough – especially the question I always ask: in one word, describe Louise. Those one words spilled out effortlessly – gracious, sweet, caring, loving, generous, gentle, unimposing. But truly that describes a lot of folks – especially in a eulogy. It wasn’t until after our meeting that Louise came to life. She came to life for me in emails. Several from Barbara, then a few from Ashley, and then a response from Charles. I could hear them remembering her. I could almost picture the scenes at your respective homes – going about your day’s grief and suddenly something must have popped into your mind and you headed straight for the computer to send me an email. Another nugget to help me capture Louise Singleton. But the truth is – some folks are hard to give words to. Some folks you just have to experience. For Louise, her life was her testimony. And when people are filled to overflowing with love for someone, words can be hard to come by. But it is my job tonight to give words for the life of Louise Singleton.

 At the heart of who she was, she was a teacher. Barbara summed it up best in one of her emails: “Louise was called to teach, every bit as much as our father was called to preach. I asked her once why she didn't just give up on the inner-city schools and go teach at a private school.  She responded, `Because I think I can make a difference in the lives of these children.’" We need more teachers like Louise today. Even to this very day she has made a difference in the lives of children. She cared about education. And she did it with such creativity and finesse. Even in retirement and recently returning to Charlotte, she has been Barbara’s assistant in the elementary Sunday School Department. She pulled together curriculum and bought supplies and gave her love of learning to Barbara’s 4th and 5th graders – and that means that Louise was teaching my son – about the love of God and way of Jesus, and for that I am pastorally and personally grateful.

 No doubt, Louise’s greatest passion was her children and her grandchildren and her family. In an email from Ashley I caught a glimpse of Louise as Grammy: “I think Anna best captured the total acceptance that my mother had of all people. She said, `Grammy made you feel like even if you were the worst person in the whole world, you matter.’ I agree with Anna's other assessment that `Grammy was the most perfect person I knew.’" The writer of Proverbs said Anna’s words this way: *her children rise up and call her blessed.* (Proverbs 31.28) And so it is with Louise. Louise gets credit for raising not only her own children, but also her grandchildren and nephews. Her way of hospitality and welcome permeated everything about the nature of Louise Singleton. As I listened to her family describe her and then read the follow-up emails, I got the image of Mother in the deepest and best sense of that word – always wanting and hoping for the best and doing all in her power that was short of meddling or enabling to bring about good in the world of her family and of the many children she has taught and nurtured along the way. She welcomed in-laws into the family in a way that made them feel like they had always belonged. In my understanding of how God works in this world, I believe Louise tried to emulate this parental nature of the divine – unconditional love, acceptance, grace, belief in the ultimate Goodness of life. Ashley described it best this way: “I remember my mother saying things to me as a child like, `People are more important than things.’  `People are different.’  `Different people like different things.’ She said the right things, but she also lived that way.” That’s the way a mother teaches a child.

 But there was the slight mischievous nature – her under the breath comments and her way with humor that was honest without tearing others down. And of course her ability to allow Charles to take her spankings for her! A longtime friend of hers said it all better than I can: “her wit and wisdom, her fearlessness in opposition to people in high places with whom she disagreed, and her gentle manner and wonderful sense of humor. She never hesitated to pop the balloons of the pompous. She bore her burdens with a feisty spirit and no complaining, much to the admiration of us all.”

 But so far, I’ve just repeated what has been reported to me about Louise. Here are my own observations. Louise was a charter member of this church. Her father was the first pastor of Park Road Baptist Church and this was home to Louise – the place where she learned the stories of Jesus and followed all the church rules and became all the grand things that all Girls in Action of the old Southern Baptist ways become. I am thankful that today this service in this sanctuary is a symbol of what it means to come home – for Louise did live a life that resembled the Way of Jesus. Though I didn’t know her mother, I think I have put together that Louise was a wonderful combination of her mother and her father. She had a way about her that was fierce for justice and truth – highly opinionated and often dogmatic in her beliefs. Sound a little like Charlie? But there was a way about her that calmed people and she could speak her truth with enough grace and kindness as not to alienate. She had a way of keeping everyone in check – keeping a certain amount of decorum to issues and relationships. Sound a little like Betty? My personal best observation with this is how she handled Barbara – no easy task, I might add. Just last week in a wonderful visit in the hospital, I stayed too long – I know better. But sitting with Louise and Barbara together was simply too much fun to leave. Barbara was ranting on about something or the other that she didn’t like about a recent worship service. Louise silenced her good. “Oh Barbara – that’s not your place to talk about that.” She pulled up her covers with just enough of a huff and just enough of a smile for me to know that she agreed with Barbara, but that Barbara ought to keep some of her opinions to herself. That little exchange prompted a follow up email from Barbara as she anticipated Louise’s death: “The world won't be as sweet without her. I apologize for my unkind words about worship Sunday. My opinions about worship are irrelevant, and I must learn to keep my mouth shut.” Thank God for Louise. It was Louise’s huff and smile – the best of Charlie and Betty put together – that I experienced last week in that hospital room. She simply had that way about her that words really cannot explain. You just had to experience it.

What will you all do without her? You will remember her well. You will give God thanks for being graced with her in your lives at all. You will tell her stories over and over. You will live your own lives a little more filled with honesty laced with compassion. You will seek to educate all children – filling them with the Truth that God is within each one of us having created us all for Good in this world. You will let your tears and your laughter mingle together as sacred reminders of the goodness of Louise Singleton: daughter, wife, mother, Grammy, sister, aunt, friend, Beloved Child of God. What will you all do without her? You will remember and give thanks.

 It dawned on me that I stand today in a very privileged place. In this very spot, Louise’s father dedicated his very life to proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I follow in his footsteps tonight even as I proclaim this Good News: Louise Milford Singleton – thanks be to God – now and forevermore. That is Good News enough – for today. May it be so.