

A Good Word for Carson Allen
April 10, 2009

There is no better way to begin this eulogy – this Good Word – than to begin with the exact same paragraph that Russ wrote to begin Aline Allen’s eulogy 2 ½ years ago. Here’s how it went: “On April 26, 1934 a young couple stood before their minister. The groom was handsome and strong. The bride was, well let me just tell you in the words of the groom, ‘she was a purty thing!’ This handsome couple stood before their minister as countless thousands of good-looking and promising twenty-somethings have done down the centuries, and in those hallowed moments they spoke those familiar words: ‘for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.’ There would be no way to count the number of couples who have stood at that marriage alter and repeated those words, but few, very few indeed, have put those words to the test like Aline and Carson Allen have. For 72 years . . . Aline and Carson tried those words – and were tried by them – and like few others before them . . . and, undoubtedly, few who will follow, they proved those words.”

The truth is that Carson has simply been lost without his Aline, his “baby,” he would call her, for the last 2 ½ years since her death. As much as he missed her, though, he remained who he was – a gracious, gentle, loving, caring man. Carson and Aline endured the toughest storms that life can throw at you – the death of both of their children. First Sylvia who died at 11 months and 10 days. And then less than two decades later a beautiful teenaged daughter named Gail was killed in a car accident. That kind of pain and that kind of grief is enough to end any sense of hope and purpose in the lives of some couples. But Carson and Aline persevered. They remained strong. Their lives were sustained by a strong faith and good friends. They were able to live life to the fullest – even through a war that separated them for over two years. Their lives are a testimony of grace and strength, courage and love. I want to be like them when I grow up.

No one better characterizes what has now become known to us as The Greatest Generation than Carson Allen. Carson served his country in WWII as a technical sergeant in the China-Burma-India Theater. And he wrote letters to his young bride nearly every day for that 2 ½ year time of service. They survived a great depression, a world war, the death of two children – how was it that he could still make anyone around him feel so loved and welcomed? He was not afraid to show his emotion and pain yet he was quick with his warm smile and loving embrace. The Greatest Generation indeed. I just don't believe they make them like Carson Allen much anymore.

One word comes to mind if you know anything about Carson. Precise. Jim's mother said that you should never go grocery shopping with Carson because he selected his green beans one green bean at a time – inspecting each one. He had a system of keeping his paper work and he didn't like anyone messing with his system. He had a way of washing the dishes. He had a system for keeping up with medication. He was meticulous with details, but if you saw his dining room table or his desk, you'd know that his systems involved a lot of pile management (a man after my own heart!) – but he knew where things were and how he liked for them to stay. To let you know about how precise his was – literally on his death bed – when Jim and Debbie were getting him settled on the night that he would die in his sleep – they placed him in the bed and he reached back to measure how far his head was from the head board and informed Jim that it was not the right distance. And he readjusted Carson to his precise placement. As Debbie was lowering the blinds that night, Carson let her know just how far to lower it. It had to be just right. And Debbie accommodated him. Jim and Debbie, let me say to you today words that I think we all long to hear and that you more than deserve today: *well done good and faithful servants* – you have cared for Carson and Aline for all of these years – not taken care of, but cared for –

including him in all the seasonal celebrations and birthdays of your own family – making them and later him a part of your life. You have shown us all what it means to be family. And Carson was grateful and so are we. *Well done, good and faithful servants.*

Carson and Aline were charter members of this church. They built it and were a part of the making of Park Road Baptist Church. Who we are as a congregation is in no small part Aline and Carson's doing. Carson sang in the choir, was active in SS, and served the church in many capacities through many years. He and Aline were in charge of setting up for communion and taking care of those being baptized. When Wendy Watson heard about Carson's death she sent me this email: "Dear sweet Carson....I did not think he would last as long as he did after she died. I remember the Sunday I was baptized. The Allens were always there assisting those being baptized and they were that day too. They both talked with me before the service about how special that day was and would always be. I don't think of my baptism without thinking of them too." That is but one testimony to their commitment to this church. How many countless people did Carson and Aline walk through the waters of baptism – giving their support, their encouragement and their blessing to someone's commitment to faith. I think we forget the impact that small acts of service can have on people's lives. This church owes a huge debt of gratitude to Carson Allen.

Today is Good Friday. In the church's year, this is the darkest, most somber day. When we set the funeral to be today it was a liturgical leap for me. On this day of deep sadness and grief as we remember the crucifixion and death of Jesus, I find that I am more pointed to Easter than ever. I have turned the corner from suffering and dying and death to hope and life and resurrection. For surely today Carson rests in the Forever Presence of God, and surely, it is Good. Thanks be to God for life. Thanks be to God for precise living. Thanks be to God for hope

in the midst of hard times. And thanks be to God for Carson Allen. Would that we all live with his portion of grace in this life. May it be so.