**A Good Word for Jean Thomas
February 29, 2020**

Jean Thomas was one of those church members every pastor loves the most – the here all the time church member. If the doors of the church were open, it was likely that Jean was walking through them. And for most of her years here – even long before us – she was one of those worker bees that keeps a church alive. If you look back through old photos of the life of the church, you will always see Jean’s face in the pictures with the work crew. Or should I call them the cook crew. You won’t find many pictures of her sitting at a table enjoying a scrumptious meal. You will see her with her apron on doing the work of putting together the scrumptious meal. Once a little age comes to those we love, and when that age has been around for a little while, sometimes it’s hard to remember them in the good old days. But I remember. Even though she hasn’t been able to be active here for quite some time because enough age happened to her, I still remember. And here’s where I remember her the most: Back in the day when Park Road told the Christmas story through the lens of a Living Tableau, on the first Saturday of December this campus was abuzz with people decorated the inside and making wreaths for all the outside doors and setting up the scenes in the back parking lot – the angel stand atop the south carport, the sheep pen for the shepherds to keep watch over their flocks by night, the stable for Mary and Joseph and the donkey to lay their heads since there was no room for them in the inn. All of this required lots of people – starting early in the morning to get the huge tree for the sanctuary and then everybody finding their place of work in order to make Christmas happen at Park Road. Jean’s place was in the kitchen. Making hotdogs for about 100 people. Every. Single. Year. She had a work crew of her own, but when I think about those hotdog lunches on the first Saturday of December, I think of Jean. And of course, once the Tableau was “lights, camera, action” ready, Jean was in the Youth Building kitchen with more hotdogs, and flipping burgers, and serving up those glorious “hot and now” Krispy Kreme donuts and hot chocolate to all the actors serving as shepherds and angels and Marys and Josephs. Jean’s job around here was often keeping us well fed. Many years ago, a pastor colleague was bemoaning church folks who complained about not being spiritually “fed.” My friend’s comment in return was: “Well maybe they should take off their bib and put on an apron.” So when I see pictures of Jean in her apron, I am reminded of the importance of the life of the worker bees in our midst. They are the ones bringing God’s kingdom to us even with a ministry of hotdogs.

 Jean’s family knows this to be true as well. Her desserts were the best. The pies and the orange blossoms and the pound cakes. The many, many pound cakes. And there was the country style steak, green beans, and mashed potatoes. She was a stay home mom who had a meat and 3 on the table at 5:30 every night as Hugh walked in the door from work. She tended the house and tended the children and that was her life’s work. She would mop the floor, straighten up the house and then it was time for popcorn and coke. She did have an outside the house job just while the kids were at school. She worked at our Child Development Center caring for other people’s children with the same love and attentiveness that she cared for her own. Jean’s life was her family and her church, and simply put, that’s just not a bad way to spend one’s life.

 To Mike’s kids they were “Grandfather and Grandmother.” To Suzanne’s kids they were “Dick and Jean.” She would make homemade Play Doh with the grandkids, and she loved showing up for their sporting events. She was the one in the stands yelling and screaming for her grandbabies! She loved making crafts. Their vacations included the beach trips to Garden Cityh and educational trips like to Kitty Hawk and to the Smithsonian. They led a bit of a Leave It to Beaver kind of life where they led by example.

 After the children were grown and gone, Jean and Dick enjoyed travelling. They took a 50th anniversary trip to Europe plus a few other trips along the way. And more recently, Jean loved her Panthers, though she didn’t know any of their names. It was never about Luke or Cam. It’s was always “did you see that #59 make that tackle” or “did you see that #1 make that throw.” And Jean loved sending cards. How many of us in this room have received frequent cards from Jean? The only thing she ever needed anyone to get for her was more cards and more stamps. Those correspondences were a ministry for Jean. She may not have even realized how important that has been to her family and friends all these years. But she wanted you to know she was thinking of you.

 When I asked Mike and Suzanne to give me one word to describe Jean, one said “Loving” and the other said “Caring.” They went on to elaborate . . . “it was never about her – except when the remote went out, then Mike had to drop everything and get over there and get her TV working!” Apparently, her only worry in life was when her TV messed up. Otherwise her way was to live her days as if they were all good. She was an uplifting soul where nothing got her in a bind and she found there was not need to worry about the stuff of life.

 Jean’s life was very well lived – dedicated to her family and to her friends and to her church. She gave out more love than she could have received. She took care of folks until it was time for her to be taken care of – and even then, with a simple card she continued her way of love and care. And when one comes to an end of a life that was so well-lived, the only thing left to say is . . . for the Good Life of Jean Thomas – *Thanks be to God.*  May it be so. Amen.