

The Park Road Pulpit
Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church
Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors



A Good Word for Sara Eggleston¹
December 10, 2017

I kept Sara Eggleston busy. It suited her just fine. She told me that when she and Nelson married she showed him her sewing room and told him that she bought and sold sewing machines like some men traded cars. That room was amazing. You've heard of the "man cave"... this was Sara's equivalent, the sewing cave. I don't remember specifically, but I'm sure there were a half-dozen different machines in that room when I first got a tour. It was lined with counter space and work tables and storage cabinets, and it was covered, stem to stern, with material, all in some stage of a project.

I kept Sara Eggleston busy. It suited her just fine. "Sara... we're doing a summer preaching series on the 'fruits of the spirit.' It would be nice if we could have a parament for the front of the pulpit each week, reflecting that week's "fruit." That was all I had to say. When we started the series, there was a beautifully crafted parament for Love, then appeared Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Meekness, Gentleness, Self Control." Amazing.

"Sara... it would be nice to have some banners for Pentecost this year, to hang along the corridor going from the sanctuary down to the back parking lot. Something that seems to represent flames, tongues of fire." That was all I had to say. The week before Pentecost I mounted wrought iron hangers, and the most beautiful banners, made of red and yellow and

¹ The word "eulogy" comes from two Greek words meaning, literally, "good word."

orange fabric scraps and toole, waved in the wind as we celebrated the Birth of the Church. Amazing.

“Sara... we don’t have any liturgical stoles to wear, representing the seasons of the church year. Would you be willing to make a set of four, Purple for Advent, Green for Ordinary Time, White for Special Sundays, Red for Pentecost, and one for Baptism and one for Communion? That was all we had to say. Amy and she designed the patterns, and every Sunday for the last dozen years, the ministers at Park Road have dressed appropriately for the season, thanks to Sara. Amazing.

“Sara... I love our sanctuary, but the one thing I miss is some color. We don’t have stained glass windows, and there’s no color behind the choir loft. Maybe we could design a banner to hang permanently behind the baptistery? That was all I had to say. She went to a book of calligraphy designs by an artist named Timothy Botts, and began piecing together the most intricate “stained-glass” patchwork, quilted banner you’ve ever seen. As I understand the Hebrew, the word doesn’t really have a meaning. Sometimes, you just need to let out a joyful noise of praise... sometimes it’s a sigh too deep for groaning, as the Bible says, and “*alleluia*” is that kind of joyful noise. When I see that banner every Sunday, in red and green and blue and white with gold touches... I remember Sara and give thanks to God for her beautiful spirit and talent. Alleluia! Amazing.

But my favorite of Sara’s creations is the banner I requested for another summer preaching series. Amy and I were planning to spend a summer dissecting the Lord’s Prayer, and I had a book of those incredible Timothy Botts calligraphies in my office. The one of the Lord’s Prayer was about the most intricate of all. Frilly and swooping lines connected the fancy script of

the prayer. “Sara... is there any way you could duplicate this design for a banner?” I didn’t know what I was asking. But nothing ever phased Sara Eggleston. “Let me study it a bit,” she said. And before the summer began she brought the most incredible banner I’ve ever seen to my office. I was overwhelmed.

One of those many machines Sara kept in her Sewing Cave was a digital Bernina. After writing Timothy Botts for permission, Sara scanned the calligraphy and enlarged it into 31 individual panels. One by one took each panel, digitized it and fed it into her Bernina embroidery machine. After the panels had been completed, she sewed them together, and then hand-embroidered any gaps between the panels, to recreate a seamless replica of the calligraphy. Amazing.

“Sara... do you have any idea how many stitches are in this banner?” I asked. “Give me a little time and I’ll see what I can come up with.” She called me back a few days later. “There are at least 105,000 stitches in The Lord’s Prayer.” Amazing.

I kept Sara Eggleston busy. It suited her just fine. Because as much as anyone I’ve known, Sara was a living tribute to the exhortation of the old Preacher of the Bible’s Ecclesiastes: “*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.*” Sometimes that last phrase is translated “*do it with joy.*” That seems about right to me because when you are well-suited to your craft, and at peace with your soul, *might* and *joy* are about the same thing. She was willing and able and tireless and creative and Sara’s joy is stitched all over this campus, and will always stand as a testimony to her life.

I’ve only talked about Sara’s sewing – and only one small portion of that body of work – but what can be seen from the handiwork that she donated to the church she loved stands as a

fitting symbol of her whole life. The poet John Keats said, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Sara believed in truth, trusted truth, sought truth, and was willing to pursue it, even when it led her beyond the safe borders of traditional religion. And Sara knew beauty, because she was beautiful. The beauty evident in the joyful work of Sara's hands sprang from a well deep within her soul.

She has been missed already too long from 3900 Park Road, but her joy will be with us as long as we can remember her beautiful smile, recall her comfortable laugh, reflect on her courageous life, and as long as her fingerprints can still be seen in banners and stoles and wall hangings... she will never die.

I kept Sara Eggleston busy. It suited her just fine. And because she always did what her hand found to do, with strength and dignity and great joy, and because she loved truth and lived beauty, may God grant her an eternity of peace.

For Sara Eggleston, who sewed her way into heaven, loving God with joy, beauty, truth and might (heart, soul, mind and strength), thanks be to God.

**A Reflection on Sewing
for Sara Eggleston
December 10, 2017**

Sara was about so much more than sewing . . . but – just look around you. Her touch is everywhere. So many banners. She loved to tell that when she fell in love with Nelson, she warned him that she traded sewing machines like some men traded cars . . . well, she must have made some good trades. I loved nothing more than hanging out in her very large sewing room on Goneaway Drive. There was warmth and welcome there. There was love there. Her gentle and creative spirit was everywhere.

And then I got an email from a friend of Sara's from the Charlotte Quilter's Guild:

I met Sara through the Charlotte Quilter's Guild. She started work shops at her house to make "cuddle" quilts for the Ronald McDonald house in Durham. From those workshops almost 30 years ago thousands of cuddle quilts have been donated to sick children at the Ronald McDonald house and local hospitals. The guild continues to do this outreach.

There was a group of quilter's who became very close after going to several workshops. Sara became our friend, mentor, example, confidant and other mother. She always had an encouraging word as we all went through many things in life. We pulled pranks on each other and loved teasing her about acting like a teenager when she met Nelson.

She was one of the smartest, most gifted, loving people I have ever met. The only thing she couldn't do was find her way home. One of the funniest things she ever did was at a guild meeting. She was inviting people to her house for a workshop. Someone said where do you live? Is it close by? She seemed stumped and said "Well". Someone said "How long have you lived there?". She said "Over 35 years, but we've added on". One time going home from Maryjos fabric store in Gastonia she called me asked " I see a sign for Concord, have I gone too far?"

I think I actually wrote my eulogy for Sara a couple of years ago, when I wrote this article for our church newsletter. I share it here again as a Good Word for Sara Eggleston:

**THANKS BE TO GOD FOR PEOPLE WHO KNIT AND SEW AND CROCHET
MARCH 6, 2015**

I got mine 9 years ago.

I had made several myself, but I had not really thought about receiving one. And then it happened to me – a time in this life when it feels a bit like someone pulled a chair out from under you or tripped you up or knocked the breath out of you. Death. Up close and personal.

No doubt one of the most influential people in my life died. My father. Our then 9 year old son said, “But he was the main excitement!” when we told him the sad news. I still can’t think of a better way to describe my dad – the main excitement.

And almost immediately upon learning to live with this new reality, I received a Prayer Shawl. I have no idea which Needler made it. I knew it wasn’t one that I had made. It didn’t matter whose needles had whipped this beautiful creation into shape, as soon as I draped it over my shoulders I felt it – the love, the comfort, the prayers. And 9 years later it is always close, draped over the arm of my favorite chair in our family room.

We talk a lot about missions around here. Much of that focus is around issues of poverty like homelessness and hunger. We also talk a lot about our partnership with our sister church in Cuba. And this is good good stuff.

But I love that folks who may not be able to travel to Cuba or may not be able to spend the night with Room in the Inn have found a way to put their mission-minded spirit into action in an innovative and creative way. They knit, they crochet, they sew. And in so-doing, they are bringing healing, hope and comfort to those who grieve and those who are sick. They bring peace to those who are lonely or afraid. Their prayers are in their handiwork.

And it makes all the difference.

It all started over 10 years ago when Sara Eggleston had the brilliant idea of a Prayer Shawl ministry. She gathered her crew, and they started knitting. And they haven’t stopped. But they have expanded. They expanded to baby quilts and stocking caps for preemies and children who are sick. They expanded to pillowcase dresses for little girls in Haiti. They expanded to toiletry packs that include washcloths and basic hygiene necessities. Thousands of feet of yarn and thousands of yards of material are all over our church and our community and our country and even our world that originated in the hands of many women of our church.

They have used their gifts and brought healing in places that are broken. And that is ministry and mission at its best.

This Sunday, March 8, 2015, when you arrive for worship, the front of the sanctuary will be filled with many of the shawls and quilts and blankets and dresses that are ready to be sent out to do their healing. We will offer a blessing upon these crafts and a word of thanksgiving for those who made them. And we will pray for those who will receive them.

As I prepare for that time of blessing and as I craft my prayer for that moment in worship, I will wrap my own shawl around my shoulders so that my prayer will be undergirded by the prayers of many - nine year old prayers that sustain me still.

Thanks be to God for people who spend the night with the homeless, for people who go to Cuba, for people who pack Backpack Snacks, for people who serve food to the hungry and for people who knit and sew and crochet.