

## A Good Word for Ruth Fletcher

Ruth Fletcher was a woman of stature. You could see it in her face. You could hear it in her words. You could feel it in the care she gave to this world. Ruth cared about things that matter, and she gave her life to them.

She cared about the earth, and she tended her little plot of ground with care. And she was tended by it. There was a bond there, between hands and humus, a little dirt under the fingernails being a good reminder of our humility before the power of creativity and its creator. You can tell a lot about a person's soul by observing her garden. Sunrise and the sunset, rainfall and first frost, the cycle of the seasons set the rhythm of Ruth's life, as they must for anyone who is in touch with her world. And Ruth was. You could see it in her hands, which loved the earth.

Ruth cared about children. As a nurse, a mother, a teacher at church, she knew that how we treat the weakest among us matters. Even at 91 she was caring about them, caring for them – giving time to her great-grandchildren, at the piano, with a needle and thread. *Let the little children come unto me...* and she did, for she knew that *the kingdom belongs to such as these*, and though it was not a matter of pride, she also knew, instinctively, that the kingdom belongs to those who cared for those to whom the kingdom belongs.

Ruth loved good music. You've heard Monty playing today some of the pieces that Ruth had noted for just such an occasion. She loved the choir, and embodied the hope of every choir director. She was faithful, consistent, hard-working, compliant – and she was joyful about music.

She wanted it real, live, she wanted it to speak to her soul, to speak of her soul, and she knew that good music did both. Ruth loved music. You could hear it when she sang.

Ruth loved learning. She was a reader until almost the day she died. But not just a reader. She engaged her books, challenged their authors, argued with their claims – you could see it in the notes she scribbled in the margins, comments and critique. Ruth loved God with all her mind.

Ruth loved her girls. Jodie, Susan, Charlotte. Three slices of Ruth and John Fletcher, with just enough uniqueness thrown in to make the world, not to mention family gatherings, interesting! Ruth cared for her daughters, which was obvious to a pastor, who could see clearly how well they cared for her. *Well done, good and faithful servants*. She was Ruth to the very end. Because you worked so hard to let her be. Thank you for the effort. For the example. For your care.

But Ruth had another love, and it's why we came to know her to begin with. Ruth Fletcher loved the Church. She grew up right here. She met John at BYPU (which is Baptist Youth Person's Union, for the uninitiated!) She supported him in seminary, and was a faithful minister's wife, with all the day-in-day out duties that are expected but not officially required. She raised her children in the church – her children and so many others. And it's no poor reflection on Pritchard Memorial Baptist Church, which was a wonderful home to the Fletchers for so long, but it is a carefully-offered critique of Church itself... those expectations can be a bit stifling. She knew the demands of church life, and, like all minister and their families, she

understood, and accepted, and resented those demands, at least a little. They're not always obvious to outsiders, but they are undeniable to insiders.

But Ruth would leave, couldn't leave Church. It was in her blood, and she was vital to its life, so Park Road became the beneficiary of her commitment. I think we also let Ruth fly, just a little. More than she could have known as a minister's wife, Park Road let Ruth be free. I could feel it in her responses to my sermons, which sometimes stray from the beaten path, onto the road of a faith less traveled. There was a free spirit that just needed a little wind to let it sail; you could detect just the slightest, faintest little hint of quietly, politely, appropriately radical faith in the glint in her eye. And maybe you could see it more obviously in the political signs that started appearing on her lawn – after she came to Park Road! Ruth wanted to be free. And she was. It ties all of those other loves together. The earth, the children, the music, the learning, the nurturing of her maternity – all these were all expressions of a soul who knew that scriptural affirmation on an intimate level: *For freedom, Christ has set us free*. Ruth wanted to be free and she was, and yet she found a way to express that freedom within the bounds of Church. I think Park Road let Ruth soar just a little, and it was good for both of us.

Her pastors will miss her quietly, politely, appropriately radical faith more than a little, and when we remember Ruth's care for the things that matter we will give thanks to God for a woman of such great stature. For Ruth Fletcher, thanks be to God.

Amen.