

A Good word for Gayle Kendrick Hall

April 24, 2012

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... (Galatians 5.22)

Amy and I have now conducted about 140 funerals, and I can say honestly that I've never heard a family sing the praise of a loved one any more than we heard yesterday when we met with John and Julie and Laurie. "She was a splendid woman. Giving. Always smiling. Patient to a fault. She never complained. She was creative. Kind. Generous. Loving. Caring. Nurturing. She was thoughtful. Considerate. She never had a bad thing to say about anyone. Never lost her temper." It went on and on! Julie finally just said she was just so good it was "kind of freakish."

If I didn't know any better, I would tell you that these three were just muddled with grief, that in the gravity of their loss, sentimentality had trumped reality and they had just added a few too many adjectives to this parade of compliments. But I do know better. And I know that just as she was born at Mercy Hospital... and received her nurse's training at Mercy... and delivered all of her children at Mercy... the goodness of which they spoke was as real as the divine Mercy which was its source.

Gayle Hall was a good woman. And she will be missed. Her kind way, her soft voice, her gentle touch will be missed by so many who had known the love of God through her own heart and hands. A bevy of animals, family pets and the birds she has tended in her yard for years. The kids in all of those elementary school classes where she was the Room Mom. Her children's friends, whom she treated as her own. Her friends in the neighborhood, and friends in the two churches she loved. Three children and one grandson, who gave her special joy. And John. For 56 years... John. All of these will miss her touch.

Gayle's special touch could be seen through her creativity. She was crafty. Into all kinds of things: pottery, ear rings, knitting, crocheting, making clothes for her children, baking cakes for all of the firemen... and those birthday parties! I'd love to have seen them. She crafted each one carefully to fit the child, and shaped each activity with the expertise that only a mother can bring to that moment. Gayle loved to write notes. When the kids would open their lunch boxes at school there would be a hand-written note from her... just a reminder of a mother's constant love. And around the house... notes for John. A few are still there – stuck on the mirror or the refrigerator. God's first work was creativity, and Gayle's kind touch could be seen as she continued that divine work, shaped in many media, and offered for many occasions.

And Gayle's special touch could be felt, as only a nurse can deliver it. After training at Mercy, three kids came along so she took a leave from nursing to be the full-time-mother that suited her so well. And then after she had raised them right, she went back. She spent 20 years in private duty nursing, and then ended her professional, official nursing career by spreading her careful touch to the aging residents of Hillside Manor. I know that Gayle was a fabulous nurse, the very best kind, because you can teach virtually anyone the specific skills of the medical profession, but "touch" doesn't come with the diploma. Only God can give that – and Gayle had gotten a double portion of that special gift – so carried out her duties with trained skill, but she nursed, with that special touch, because it was in her heart.

And it was her heart that attracted a young Company Adjutant who was serving his country at Fort Jackson. (OK... to be honest, it wasn't just her heart that attracted John, but he'll have to say more about that! It is nice when the gift comes in a beautiful package.) Back to the story... the young Company Adjutant was traveling to and from Fort Jackson with another

soldier, who had a beautiful girlfriend. When that soldier mysteriously received a military transfer, and was shipped out to Korea, the young Company Adjutant (whose responsibilities ironically included signing all military transfer orders) stepped in to offer his sympathies. How kind of John to attend so caringly to young, brokenhearted Gayle, whose boyfriend was now thousands of miles away... The rest, as they say, is history.

If you read the Bible carefully, you'll find all sorts of mischief in the lives of its characters, all sorts of conniving and scheming and in those stories, as in the story of a young Company Adjutant who arranged for the transfer of a boyfriend so he could spend the rest of his life with the girl of his dreams... In all of those stories we find the hand of God! You don't stay married for 56 years if God isn't in that marriage – especially, I might add, if that young Company Adjutant is John Hall! Talk about patience. And courage. And, we probably need to add “vision” to the list of accolades. I'm not sure what she saw in John, but she did a grand job of bringing out the very best he had to offer! John says he was a “slow learner” and she was a “good trainer” and his has been a “grand tour through life with her.” I love those words.

They were in love for 56 years. It was in this very room that they were married on January 1st. It's the best New Year's Resolution John ever made! They raised three children, and have known the joys and the heartaches of being parents. They traveled extensively – Aruba and Hawaii and Mexico and the Keys... What memories they made! And they were active in their church, raising their children here, and a host of others. I heard just this morning from a woman whose children had been in a Sunday school class that John and Gayle taught years ago, and you could still hear the adulation and the gratitude in her voice.

Julie and Laurie and Jeff all participated with John and Gayle in the annual Christmas pageant which was known at Park Road Baptist for 59 years just as “Tableau.” And when the doors were open, you could count on someone from the Hall family being here. To the end they were faithful – even when Gayle didn’t feel like coming, she and John were there, in the back, right of the sanctuary. Every Sunday. And in those final days they were faithful – John and Julie and Laurie, by her side. It’s been a long three months, and an interminable last week, but you were there, by her side, ever minute. She knew it. I’m convinced of that. That human presence extends beyond and beneath the level of consciousness, so even when she couldn’t tell you... she knew. You were there, and what a fabulous ministry to your mother. Well done, good and faithful servants. Well done.

She will be missed. She was a good woman. She had a kind touch. A big heart. And a solid faith. Julie told us yesterday that her mother’s faith had grown in the last few years – and what a wonderful testimony. Rather than retiring, and resting on old habits and comfortable convictions, she kept on striving in this life to know the God who had given her life. Because of her faith in Jesus Christ, who said to Martha, and to Gayle and to all who will listen, *I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will never die...* (John 11.25). Because of that faith, even through tears of grief, this day we celebrate.

She was a good woman. And she still is. Today, tomorrow, forever, in the heart of God. And from there... we can still feel her touch.

For Gayle Kendrick Hall... Thanks be to God!