

CELEBRATE LIFE

Celebrating the Life and the Resurrection of Becky Farris
Proverbs 22:1-6; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Ephesians 2:1-10

Mrs. Rebecca Petrie Farris, affectionately referred to by many in this community as “Aunty” or “Aunt Becky,” was 92 years old when she entered into the more immediate presence of our Lord on August 17.

Aunt Becky saw and experienced a lot in her 92 years. Each of us can learn from her life how to live our own lives. AS witnessed by the multitude of pictures that chronicle her life, Aunt Becky was a snappy dresser, but more than that, Aunt Becky ALWAYS wore a smile. She enjoyed life. That does not mean that her life did not hold hardships, however. Born in Spartanburg, SC, early in life she saw poverty, a depressed economy, broken family ties, and several moves. However, despite all the difficulties, her mother was determined to keep her family together, bringing the children to Barium Springs Home for Children in 1928 with strict instructions that these children should not be considered for adoption, as she would be back to get them as soon as she was more secure. AND... she did.

By the grace of God, Aunt Becky grew into a beautiful, graceful, determined, young woman. At various times in her life she lived in Washington, Maryland, and Florida in addition to NC.

As the writer of Ephesians tells us, “for by grace you were saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; IT IS A GIFT OF GOD.” Aunt Becky experienced that grace in multiple ways and lived her life in joy, love, forgiveness and mercy. Many Christians choose to live their lives in fear, rather than faith. As a member of First United Methodist Church of Stuart, FL, Aunt Becky sang in the choir and practiced a grace-filled life.

The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you *are* because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you. And, indeed, Aunt Becky experienced the grace of God throughout her life.

Aunt Becky was always the life of the party. She worked for the telephone company in various capacities for a total of 42 years. She was married to the love of her life, Luther Farris for 28 years. Together, they enjoyed life. They enjoyed life as Aunt Becky worked with the Telephone Pioneers of America on various projects that served the community and the world. They grew together as Aunt Becky received numerous recognitions for that work and was elected President of her local chapter, serving several different terms.

You see, Aunt Becky and Luther understood that accepting God's gift of grace was key to living a life of joy and happiness in this life. As the writer reminds us, to be a Christian, is to be crucified with Jesus, to die with him, to be buried with him, to be raised with him, to be enthroned with him.

Today, as we celebrate the Life of Becky Farris, a woman who came into this community a little more than 2 years ago, we can learn from her that we are to celebrate this life. Though we will miss the earthly presence of Aunt Becky, the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians,

leaves us little time to question or to cry; in death he does not dwell on the obituary, but pulls away from the grave news and towards the great news: For those who have no redeeming qualities, God has "raised us up, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. So that in the ages to come, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6-7).

Today we do not mourn the passing of life, but we celebrate life that is lived in the light of that great news. You see, the wonder of this text is that we are allowed to penetrate the future. Not the future that tells us whether we'll have enough to retire, but, rather, a far more encompassing future. Paul sees that God "has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

The amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is gathering up our sins, our failures, our pains, our brokenness, our pasts, our presents, and our great illusions of foresight into the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. This is huge--so huge that many cannot seem to fathom its size and scope. Instead they shrink it and trim it, preaching and proclaiming that God isn't gathering up "all things," just "some" things. You know the more righteous of this world! The more pure of this world! The things that look right, and behave correctly, and have some redeeming qualities about them. But that is just not the way it is. After all, what's right, what's pure, what's redeeming? The answer may depend on who you ask.

My mother tells a story about my brother Mark when he was about 4 or 5 years old. The story begins with my mother hearing her young son shouting at a friend just outside the kitchen window. "Stop! Stop," he yelled. Stop! Stop! Stop!"

My mom looked out and saw the neighbor boy stomping on the ground and my brother shoving him away. "What are you doing? They're only ants," shouted the neighbor boy. "They've got a right to live too!" was the comeback from my brother.

My mother watched as my brother got down on his knees and with one hand he tweezered one by one little black speck into his other hand. Standing back up he looked at all the wounded he had gathered up. "Oh little ants," he said, "don't worry! My mommy will take care of you!"

Who decides what is right, pure, redeeming? My brother saw something worth redeeming in a handful of broken ants. He knew that the love of his mom was so powerful that it could gather up all the hurt in this world and heal it. How much more powerful is the love of God? Paul sees God's love as so great that it includes what the Greeks called "ta panta," the totality. All things! That the ants, the neighbor kid, the cancers, the dementias, the "ruler of the power of the air," the "disobedient" spirits, the desires of the flesh and senses...will meet their deaths and be raised and reconciled with God!

We have experienced this too, for Paul is really taking us on a tour of our life in Christ, for in our baptisms we have died with Christ, been buried with Christ, been raised with Christ. We know something of being enthroned with him in the heavenly places. We are people who know our futures for "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). The Christian

life is one in which a glorious future has been revealed, and we can live without fear. Mystery solved. The trouble is that rather than celebrate life, we too often live in fear. A young woman named Katherine was a part of my youth group. Ten years later she was diagnosed with cancer. She fought against that cancer with everything she had; and when there was no more that they could do for her, she asked me, "I know how to live, but how do you die? I'm scared." I don't remember what I told her. But I remember what she told me, for I watched her handle her days with dignity and grace.

I heard how on late evenings when she could not sleep from either pain or worry, she would call her mother, calls sometime by phone, sometime to her bedside, either way, they would open a hymnal and sing together. "O God, our Help in Ages Past our Hope in Years to Come." They would sing, "It is well, it is well, with my soul." They would sing, "When we've been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun."

They would sing until they could see the future together. And when she finally found the mystery revealed, she could rest.

Aunt Becky, on the afternoon before she transitioned from this world to the next, laughed, sang, made silly faces and experienced great joy. You know how to die when you know what the future will bring. God! When you know what the future will bring. Joy! When you know what the future brings. Life! Isn't it wonderful? It is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Though Aunt Becky's earthly remains will rest with her beloved Luther in Stuart, FL, today we give thanks that, by the grace of God, we can learn how to live and how to die from this woman who lived life in faith.

Let us pray. God of the past, our times are in Your hand; abide with us. Lead us by faith to hope's true promised land; be our guide. With Your blessings, the darkness shines as light, and faith's fair vision changes into sight. Amen.