

I don't know about you, but I need some strong words of comfort today:

- Our beloved Nan is gone home, leaving US behind.
- And we clearly are living in a world where evil lurks.

I'm not going to dwell on the evil. You know that evil exists. If evil isn't seeking us out personally it's plenty evident, because evil tries to make us doubt and fear, tries to sap us of hope, tries to undo creation.

Yes, I need comfort today. Because Nan Virginia Taylor Pendergrass—one of the rays of hope that this community had, that this family had, for 97 years—has gone home.

Fortunately, being who she was, Nan herself has provided us with the message today. She herself planned this service, picked the prayers, and showered us with the music of HER hope.

So what is the testimony of the child who slept under the house for safety from the Night Riders in the rural racist Virginia of the early 20th century? What is the testimony of THAT child to **us**, we who gather in churches in urban racist America of the 21st century? We are THAT child, THIS woman's family, family of origin, family of her choice, family of God. From Nan's remarkable life, well-lived and perfectly appointed with achievement and all the social graces, here is HER testimony:

- "Jesus is the BEST thing that ever happened to me."
- "Because [Jesus] lives, I can face [the] tomorrow [that is here for me now]."
- "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

This is where Nan found HER hope.

You see, the apostle Paul, who wrote these words, thought that we ourselves don't even know, really, how to pray. For example, should we pray for enough money to live on in our retirement, or for a new job? Should we pray for safety from hate, or for justice? Should we pray in thanksgiving for Nan's life, or for God to help us with our grief? Paul tells us that God's Spirit will help us pray, that God's Spirit searches our heart, knows the will of God, and perfects our prayers.

Here Paul also says that the Spirit of God will help us with our lives. The image we get is of God making all things—even the unthinkable things such as death—work together for God's purposes. So not only does the Spirit adjust our prayers to make them better than they are, the Spirit guarantees that in important matters, the Spirit works things out for God's ultimate purpose.



Paul wants to comfort us with these words. And they ARE comforting. Created by God, redeemed by God, and assisted by the Holy Spirit, we can have full confidence—like Nan—that “...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, not depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

These are strong words because they can stand up, hold us up, in the face of losing one we love.