Eulogy for Brenda Pridgen Williams, July 24, 2009 – Bear Marsh
Missionary Baptist Church
W. Kenneth Williams, her proud husband

In addition to all of the honors and leadership roles that Brenda accumulated in her life, Brenda’s Senior Superlative at North Duplin High School was “Most Dependable.” As it happened, I had the same designation at Boiling Springs High School in Spartanburg, SC. We were not the same in our dependable natures, however. I am dependable under a sense of obligation and training. Brenda was dependable out of enthusiasm for life. I endure responsibility; she craved it – no, she loved it! Of the two approaches to dependability, hers was far superior to mine. She took me on as a lifetime project to teach me how to be dependable in her way. The result was mutual love and respect that was genuine, and productive, and a witness to the power of God to bring people together.

Bringing people together was what Brenda was all about. She knew about togetherness from the day she was born. A large family in a small house produces a great deal of togetherness, togetherness that requires organization, and Brenda loved the products of family and community organization – food, conversation, creative purpose, laughter, games, and ideas for the future. For Brenda, it was all about “the next time we get together, we will do... we will go... we will see...” If she had anything to do with it, it would be that way the next time. Even in these last difficult months, her focus was on what is to come. She was absolutely the most hopeful person I have ever known.

For Brenda, it was simple. She believed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which, at its core is about three things, love, resurrection, and creation. These three things formed her basic optimism and reinforced her joy. You learn love in family. It is reinforced in church and community. You love yourself by testing your limits and pushing them out a little farther. This is the process of creation. You don’t learn to fly by passively watching others do it. You learn to fly by feeling the exhilaration of flight! And, Brenda learned to fly!

Jesus said: “I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly.” Brenda took Jesus at his word. No amount of adversity in Brenda’s life could prevent her from the pursuit of abundant joy. And, as with Jesus, her joy was never complete unless it was a shared joy. Joy grew with each additional person who walked into the circle of her life. One of her friends paid Brenda the highest of compliments, “Brenda was Jesus with skin on.”

Early in her walk with cancer, Brenda and I made a decision. We would not use the language of warfare when we referred to her cancer. To make cancer an enemy was to empower it. To “fight it” was to use up precious energy. So, we referred to it as our cancer adventure, another experience in which love empowers creativity and inspires resurrection hope. Brenda made a commitment to make her illness a witness to the power of faith, hope, and love.
Brenda was formed by the faith and uniqueness of the Pridgen family, the relationships of this church, the tightness of the Beautancus and Mt. Olive communities, and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. How good that she has returned home!

I must thank you, every one of you, who have taken me into your lives so that I could be with Brenda and have my life shaped by what shaped hers. Yes, thank you.

Summer always brought a second Christmas for Brenda, and me, and our children – a trip to the beach. Topsail became a sacred place – restorative, joyful, unifying. Of special significance to Brenda and me were sunrises and sunsets. In 2004 I went to Charles and Jo’s Topsail house by myself for a week to read, to write, and to pray. This poem was a product of my work and our love. I believe them to be God-given words for then, and now.

Sunrise Over Topsail:

I watched the sun rise over Topsail today
But, you were not here.
The sun’s rays were not nearly as piercing, the orb not nearly as bright
Without you.

You are like the sun to me you know.
At the earliest your hair glowed bright red
Glorious, brash, dominant, your crown filling every room
You entered.

At your full rising – now – the brightness is more pure, blond becoming white
All other colors burned away as your full wisdom takes in all that has been
Wisely keeping the secret of what will be.
You, here.

Now, in my self-chosen solitude, a play on Ole Sol’s nickname,
The day is brightening like my mother’s face at my birth.
The sun announces “Love is the Sun,” and you are here, glowing for
Me, alone.

Just like clouds mean nothing to the sun, whose brightness
Is unchanging, so the distance means nothing to us.
You are still as bright and glowing, piercing, present, illuminating, announcing that
We are together.

The sun has risen over Topsail
Forever, love.

A poem for Brenda, January 23, 2004