

**Order of Worship honoring the life and memory of
Winnell Hardin. February 11, 2017**

Prelude music

Welcome, opening remarks:

I want to thank everyone for being here and welcome you on behalf of First Christian Church and all the people who knew and loved Winnell.

Winnell Rathael Hardin lived long and loved much. She loved good food. The flat of the land. She loved learning and teaching. Especially about her Lord. She loved Gene for 69 years of marriage. Many stories. She loved her family. And her legacy is a very long list: Ronald and LaFreda. Charles and Barbara. Jana and Stuart. Brad and Amy. Holly and Matt. Kasey and Sami. Reid. Luke. Cole. Gray. Parker. Hailey. Simo. Lea. Sade.

When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov saw misfortune among his people, it was his custom to go to a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and misfortune averted.

Many years an generations later, it fell to his disciple, the Rabbi Israel, to intercede with Heaven. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God. "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient. God made man (God made woman – God made Winnell) because He loves stories.

Today, it's story hour. The stories of our lives that start with Winnell Rathael Hardin. Please join me for a word of prayer.

Let us pray:

Prayer: Our God of grace and glory, we remember and honor Winnell today and we thank you for giving her to us to know and to love. By your compassionate presence, console us in our mourning. Inspire in us the confidence of a certain faith, the comfort of holy hope, and the peace which passes all understanding; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Congregational hymn: "Praise Him, Praise Him."

Scripture readings

Psalm 121

**I lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help?
My help cometh from the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth.**

He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

**Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand.**

**The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The Lord will watch over your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore.**

Psalm 23

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.

**He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake
Ye though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

**Thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.**

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

John 14:1-3.

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

Duet: "In the Garden."

About Winnell –

THE LIFE OF WINNELL HARDIN

We are gathered here on this beautiful winter day to say our sad and love-filled good-byes to Winnell and to give this strong-willed and kind-hearted woman with much spunk and sass a most joyous send-off. As we officially give her back to you on this day, O Lord, we do so with hearts of gratitude for her wonderfully loving and long life and for how she was finally able to sneak away peacefully with her Savior last Friday morning. We are humbled by Winnell's can-do attitude and devotion to loved ones and we are in awe of the remarkable way she packed so much hospitality, hard work, mischief, faith and sense of delight into her living. Winnell loved life, lived her many years on this earth her way, cherished her relationships with family and friends and knew deep down that life was truly a gift from God.

While it has been difficult to witness the slow decline of Winnell's body these last few years, her heart, mind, hearing and outspokenness, when she was able to find her words, remained incredibly strong, intact and most precise! Her Hospice nurse, Peggy said, "Mrs. Hardin would not speak for days and I would be sitting in her room, assessing her and all of a sudden she would answer me and her response was clear as day! When Mrs. Hardin said something, she meant it!"

In this church and in the Pansy Baptist Church of her childhood, Winnell found a sense of home and community that renewed her spirit and holy purposes each week and reminded her always of

the faith in Jesus that was her foundation and hope. I believe she would be so grateful that we have gathered here to celebrate her life and would want us to give thanks for the marvelous gift of life she had been given. While Winnell's passing truly marks an end of an era, the unique ways she lived and loved has left us a bountiful legacy and continues to remind us how the bonds of family, faith, and friendship truly sustain our lives and nurture our souls over the long haul of our journeys.

Winnell was preceded in death by her loving husband, Gene, her parents, R.C. and Rella, her sister, Mary Ratheal Havens and her brother, Melvin Ratheal. Winnell is survived by her devoted sons and their wives, Ronald and Freda and Charles and Barbara; four grandchildren, Jana and Stuart Burns, Brad and Amy Hardin, Holly and Matt Hoel and Kasey and Sami Toivola; nine great-grandchildren, Reid, Luke, Cole and Gray Hardin, Parker and Hailey Hoel, and Simo, Lea and Sade Toivola; and many nieces, nephews, family members, and friends.

Sara Clara Winnell Ratheal was born to R.C. Ratheal and Rella Starrett Ratheal in Crosby County, Texas on September 5, 1923. She had an older brother, Melvin and a little sister, Mary who was 12 years younger. Winnell grew up on a farm where she learned all about raising hogs, cows and chickens, tending to the vegetable garden, hoeing and picking cotton, making butter and learning to cook---all of these experiences later enabled Winnell to be the best and most capable farm wife and mother when she and Gene settled on their farm south of McAdoo and raised Ronald and Charlie. Winnell remembered the hard times of the Great Depression and she never shied away from hard work, saving for a rainy day and making the most of the resources at hand.

Winnell loved to tell her sons when they were young that she had to walk every day 3 miles to and from her little two-room school house in the Leatherwood Community. Winnell said that while she and Melvin would start their walk together, he always ran ahead and left her behind. Winnell had several aunts and uncles along her route to school and if it was cold, she would

stop at their houses and warm up if necessary! Winnell attended this little country school through the seventh grade and then was spoiled by a school bus that picked her up and took her to school in Crosbyton where she graduated from Crosbyton High School when she was just 16 years old. Winnell attended Draughon's Business School and was always a good typist.

When I asked Winnell how she and Gene got together, I heard another interesting story. Winnell said that they had been dating some when one night she was flirting with Gene's neighbor, Jack and of course, Gene got angry and left. When Winnell realized the error of her ways, she wrote a note of apology to Gene and let him know that she would love to have him take her out on New Year's Eve. Well, Gene decided to forgive Winnell, and the rest is history! Winnell said that they dated for about six months when he proposed to her on a Friday night. Winnell always remembered that her loving mother dropped her work in the fields and went to Lubbock to buy Winnell a wedding dress. A few days later, Winnell and Gene got married on July 26, 1943. I have been told that every now and then, Winnell laid down the law to Gene and that every two or three years, he went along with what Winnell wanted!

According to Winnell, for a few years after they married, they lived here, there and yonder and times were tough. When they settled on the farm in McAdoo and the boys were young, they ate red beans, taters and cornbread for most of their meals except on Sundays when Winnell killed a chicken and they dined with the preacher or family that came to visit and share a meal after church. Winnell always saved the pulley bone for Ronald because she knew it was his favorite! Their mother spoiled Gene and the boys, each in her own way. Ronald and Charlie told me that their father did not like to eat leftovers so each day, their dear mother made a fresh pot of red beans and a wonderful pan of cornbread and they never went hungry! For special occasions, Winnell made her boys a pineapple pie or cake for special occasions!

Winnell and Gene had a loving, respectful and good marriage and they spent 69 years together until his death in 2013. Winnell was the epitome of a farmer's wife -- a wonderful cook as well as Eugene's helper in the field when needed! Winnell was a devoted wife and mother and she saw Gene and the boys as her responsibility and this was what she wanted to do and she did it well even if she didn't spare the rod and spoil the child—the boys said that mother was the disciplinarian and all it took was one encounter with her fly swatter or switch to know that she meant business!

Winnell and Gene lived close to both of their parents and Ronald and Charlie have fond memories of holidays and Sunday dinners with both sets of grandparents and a life well lived with many aunts, uncles and cousins always around! The boys told me that they grew up going to the Pansy Baptist church where Gene and Winnell grew up and were baptized in stock tanks. Their mother insisted on the family being at church every Sunday morning and every Sunday night until the Hardins got a television and Winnell enjoyed watching Bonanza on Sunday nights instead of going to church!

I would now like to share with you some of the poignant remembrances I have received from Winnell's grandchildren. Her oldest granddaughter, Jana, said, "my fondest memory of Grandmother was when we had our birthday and she would always make two small cakes. The cake for the one having the birthday was always a littler bigger, but she never wanted the other to feel left out and we didn't have to share with the other. It was very thoughtful and made us feel special."

Winnell's only grandson, Brad says this about his grandmother, "I have very fond and loving memories of Grandmother, but my most memorable was when I spent part of a summer on their farm when I was 13. We would see Grandmother and Granddad several times a year, but being that we lived in Austin, it was never typically more than 2-3 days at a time until that summer. Grandmother would get me up early so that I could "begin the work day" and she would always have a hot and freshly cooked breakfast option. I would always choose the honey-bun, since

that was always an option. What a special treat. I think that was probably the last time I ate one!

Most days I would help Granddad around the farm, but on a lot of occasions I would run around with Grandmother to get anything that they would need from town. Looking back, I really cherished those occasions because there were not many times in my life that it was just the two of us. I remember our lunches, trips to the grocery store, John Deere house, etc. On our way back to the house, and once we pulled off of the main highway, she would typically let me drive their little Toyota truck. I bragged to my friends a lot about that since I was only 13 and one of the few that had any driving experience at that age. When I went to Texas Tech for college, I would go out to visit as often as possible. I always enjoyed being with her and especially her home cooked meals. We always had a great time together and she was always very loving, patient and helpful.”

Winnell’s youngest granddaughter, Kasey said, “My sister, Holly and I called our grandmother, Mawmaw and Mawmaw was a loving grandmother. Holly and I loved her and we were truly blessed with amazing and wonderful grandparents. When we'd go to McAdoo to visit my grandparents, Mawmaw usually always prepared us a meal and her food was a treat! I sure miss having her red beans (of course one of my Dads favorites too), her fried okra was amazing and pineapple chess pie, so yummy. She enjoyed going to church and going to visit her friends. I remember her going to visit those in the nursing home (R&R she called it). She enjoyed reading her Bible and keeping a journal, her faith was strong and important. I know she was a hard worker around the farm, grew an amazing garden and kept up the house chores. I never heard her complain and I always enjoyed my chats with her! Mawmaw had the best sense of hearing, she could hear everything, I know up until today when she left us that she could hear everything, she might of not had the energy to answer us as much these past few months but I know she could still hear. She will be missed greatly, always loved and never forgotten, I am blessed she was my grandmother!”

Her daughter-in-law, Freda said, “Gene, Ronald and Charlie were the center of her world. She was a great mother, wife and grandmother. Winnell crocheted beautiful afghans and shared them with her loved ones. She was so good to and loved to send greeting cards to everyone in the family and community on special occasions and get well cards and sympathy cards. She decided to order and sell boxed cards to her friends that inquired where she got her beautiful cards. It was a good service since they lived in the country. Winnell was a great cook and made awesome pies. Her family’s favorite was a pineapple double crust lattice pie and she developed the recipe from scratch! To God, Winnell was a faithful servant. ‘The Good Lord’, as she called Jesus, was her strength and hope.”

Winnell received much comfort, strength and reassurance from the relationships she had with her beloved family, her many dear friends, and her loving God. Her Christian beliefs and her faith in our forgiving and generous Lord sustained her in times of great loss and comforted her from beginning to end. Winnell found great solace in studying the Bible and always taking notes, teaching Sunday school for years, and in leading some of her Sunday school students to the Lord. Whenever I visited her in the nursing home, she always wanted me to end my visit with a prayer. It is obvious here today that Winnell was a hard-working, caring, giving and beautiful woman who truly left her mark on us and on this world. It has been said, “That which we do for ourselves stays with us. That which we do for others lives on and is immortal.”

While Winnell’s death fills us with sadness, her grand presence in our midst leaves us with great reminders of the significance family, friendship and faith have in our lives. Through her determined nature, her devotion to others, and her gift of connecting with other people, Winnell knew how to make the most of the precious and fragile gift of life we are each given to live. Although her journey through this life is now complete, her loving presence will continue to give us strength, fond memories, many smiles and an enduring sustenance for each of us on our own sacred journeys. Winnell left us last Friday with a

lot of life in her years and a lot of love, peace, gratitude, and joy in her heart.

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me and the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:6-9

PASTORAL PRAYER & LORD’S PRAYER

God of Life, Death, and Resurrection, we gather today to give you thanks for Winnell Hardin, for the gift of her life and for the many ways her faithful and devoted presence will encourage each of us to make the most of our limited time here on this earth. We ask that you will be with her family and friends in this time of grief -- offer comfort, strength, peace, love, and hope in ways that continue to affirm life and nurture faith. But we feel more than loss and sadness on this day. We realize, dear God, that our hearts are also filled with an essence of life we would not now have without our having loved and been loved by Winnell. The gift of her most full and good life, reminds us that it is not what we have left when all is said and done but rather it is what we give of our selves in the service of others as we go about our daily routines that truly makes us all more whole and more well. We are grateful for the values, abundance, faith, care and nurture we have received from being a part of Winnell’s life. Thank you, God, for the gift of Winnell and for blessing us through her. As we leave this church, may our sadness and grief be touched by a sense of the wonder Winnell had for life, for people, and for You, O Lord. May we be blessed by the remembrances we will always have and like Winnell may we be open to the adventure of life and the joy of the journey. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray, “Our Father who art in heaven,... Amen.

Congregational Hymn: “Amazing Grace.”

Scripture and Sermon – Jerry Koch

“My parents were cotton farmers” might well be the title of an All-American love story. A story tied directly to the essential matters in the creation of the universe.

The Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.

Gene and Winnell.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind upon the earth.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation ... And God saw that it was good.

Well, that might be one way to say it. “But my parents were cotton farmers.” To which might resonate more aptly the first verse from a song by West Texan Butch Hancock:

**There’s thunderstorms buildin up over on the county line
all the neighborin farms got rain but I never get a drop on mine
you might think a little ol’ summer breeze couldn’t do nobody
harm but it burns like a blazin blowtorch
when you’re livin on a DRY LAND FARM.**

**Dry land farmers bet all in every year on the likelihood of rain.
On the West Texas panhandle. Who says they’re
Conservative???**

Any good sociologist will tell you that the Bible’s creation story of the man and the woman has been wrongly appropriated to justify our culture placing men and women on hierarchies. Man up. Woman down. And there is ample evidence of that throughout the history of business, sports, politics, and religion. And as much better as it has gotten some places, not so much even yet in others.

But not on the Dry Land Farm.

Man and woman – Gene and Winnell – were PARTNERS on the Dry Land Farm. Equal partners in what needed to happen and what got done. If Gene grew the plants, Winnell put down the roots. There was no one without the other. Among other things and for purposes of illustration, Winnell was the book keeper. And some years, the report was pretty simple. Credit: Too much. Debit: Too little. And as the book keeper also kept the house, that more meant more beans, less bacon. And another seed sack shirt for play. Her calling was to keep the wheels on the home so Gene could roll the planter.

Family. Root. Winnell.

I did not know Winnell very well. And that's my loss. I'm lucky enough to know Charlie and his family quite well. And I know that apples tend not to fall far from the tree. Some roll away a little, for better and for worse, but usually not too far from the heart of the matter. And I'm guessing Winnell was pretty close to the heart of the family.

Charlie pulled me aside before worship one Sunday a few years ago and told me, in just a few words, that he was leaving Wells Fargo. Maybe retiring for good. And he alluded to the reason – the reason which now, several years later, is abundantly clear to all of us. It had stopped being much fun to work for Wells Fargo. The days of Jack and Charlie and a handshake. Those days were gone. And some dry land farms went with those days of trust and faith.

**He didn't say it just this way, but this is what I heard: "If they're not doing right, I'm not doing with them."
So he didn't.**

I'm pretty sure that those words – or to that effect – were words he heard years before. Words spoken in his Mother's voice: "If they're not doing right, we're not doing with them."

You don't make a life from 160 acres on a dry land farm – keep a home, love a husband – and raise two boys, by not doing right. You do right. And you don't do with those who don't. You may

have to sell your cotton for less than you want some years, but you never have to sell out your integrity. Your heart. Family. Charlie and Ronald. Conscience. Heart. Winnell.

Jesus said, "You shall know them by their fruits."

Reid, Luke, Cole, and Gray – Parker, Hailey, Simo, Lea, and Sade. Winnell's nine greats. Who didn't know her as much as their parents, and certainly their grandparents. But all those kiddos know and love well. They know and love their parents and grandparents. So they know Winnell by becoming her legacy.

As you grow, little ones – not so little ones -- , you might have someone tell you sometime – "Your great-grandma would've liked that." Or maybe you'll over hear your folks or grandparents look at you, or make over of something you've done, and say, "There's Winnell." Count yourself lucky when that happens.

"My parents – grandparents – great-grandparents – they were cotton farmers." These words start a love story. Not, I suspect, a love story in the sense that every day was Valentine's day. Dry land farmers I know are sentimental in other ways. Deeply rooted ways. Sentimental about the land. The people they live with, and on it together.

The best love stories are stories of how people got through. Got through together. Got through together being grateful at least some time every day that they had each other. Because surely every now and then, the rains came and the sun blessed those who loved living on the Dry Land Farm. Who knew the blessings of every day were reflected in the eyes of those they loved.

And God saw that it was good. Amen.

Let us Pray:

God of all grace, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to bring life and immortality to light. We give you thanks because

by his death Jesus destroyed the power of death and by his resurrection has opened the kingdom of heaven to all. We pray that we might be ever more certain that because he lives we shall live also, and that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come shall be able to separate us from your love which comes to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Benediction:

Let us go in Peace.

Postlude.