

Margaret Bird eulogy
February 26, 2024, 11 am
Psalms 100 & 139

Did you know that Margaret Bird hummed while she worked? If she was doing dishes or baking or otherwise lost in thought, she hummed. She had a song, a musicality to her, and if you stopped and noticed and paid attention to this remarkable woman, you'd hear it. I can't believe we've lost her. She was not young, of course. But she'd been through so much to come back with her health, and we all thought she'd make it longer. The last time I saw her was here in church, she seemed triumphant, to have returned to normal. Maybe she was just that way, humming with life, at whatever stage.

Margaret was born on April 17th, 1939. Mitch Hepburn was premier of Ontario, Ralph Day was mayor of Toronto, his Majesty George VI was King of England. She was born near Manchester England, but her mother's family had lived in Canada, so they wisely shipped Margaret and her mother and her brother Jamie and big sister Sheila back to North America. She never knew her father, he died of heart failure back in England. Her mother Grace took a job as an assistant dean at the Ontario Ladies College. That got Margaret access and tuition to a good school. She went on to the University of Toronto. Her brother Jamie also went to the U of T, and would you believe that he was killed in a car accident? Grace Bird had mourned a husband dead during a war a continent away, now she and her girls mourned this crushing loss, God bless Jamie Bird's name and memory.

Margaret finished at the U of T with an English major and then worked in book editing in London for a time. She came back for a certificate in teaching and then went into that field in Scarborough, teaching English for 20 years. Then she became was a pioneer in teaching English as a Second Language to new Canadians. We think of that as something that always existed, and it should have, but it didn't. She not only taught, she grew close to students, some of whom she stayed in touch with the rest of her life. She worked for the Scarborough Board of Education for the rest of her career.

But her work wasn't her whole life. As an unmarried woman she had a sort of freedom, and she enjoyed it. She traveled all over the world, and later would casually drop reference to exotic places she'd been. While her sister Sheila was busy raising her and John's four boys, Margaret had the time to listen to the Beatles and Gordon Lightfoot. And she *played* the guitar! A particular favourite was the Newfoundland folk song, "She's Like the Swallow." The lyrics are too sad to quote even at a funeral. The Allen boys remember their aunt as a sort of second mom, coming to the cottage, giving their mum a break, taking them on hikes, reading to them at night. And she always had some slide show to present her travels. The boys say that by the *third* hour these slide shows got a little long. The boys got a little restive. They don't remember Margaret having a cross word with them ever. Maybe that's why they loved her so – they could get away with more. But I don't think so. Margaret hardly ever had a cross word with anybody. Now she was no pushover – she had that teacher voice, and a manner when you'd crossed

a line – you knew it. But she might be the gentlest soul any of us have known.

Margaret lived with and took care of her mother as the two lived together and Grace aged. And at some point, she realized all her relatives were getting married – from the next generation down. And she wondered, well, why not me? She told me she took out an ad in the *Globe and Mail*. And she met someone: John Fisher, whom she married on May 1st, 1999 here in this sanctuary. Six months after she became a bride for the first time she became a grandmother for the first time, as her new step-daughter Susan Fisher had that generation's first baby, Robin. Margaret had two families, and she loved them both well, remembering birthdays, teaching music, leading celebrations, listening attentively, being curious, giving of herself. I think of her intense gaze, her blazing blue eyes, her patient manner that made you slow down and take time, because she took time with everyone. John Allen says of his sister-in-law that she had a deep calm about her. May the Lord grant us all a double portion of her spirit.

One of the Allen sons said to me that their aunt Margaret didn't evangelize. That is, she didn't tell others overtly about Jesus Christ, that wasn't her way. She was . . . and you lost the word for it. You later sent me 1st Peter 3:15: "Always be ready to give a defense of the hope that is in you." Defense – sounds, well, defensive. That's not her. But the next verse most certainly is: "Do it with gentleness and reverence." God could have written that verse with Margaret Bird in mind. We might call her a witness. Her way of intensely engaging with whoever was before her, of

regarding the other with affection, of humming when no one was before her but God, that's all a witness to Jesus Christ. Her life was not easy. But it was good. Profoundly good. The sorrow of those she's left behind is also a witness. This was a good woman, full of love, a disciple of Jesus, one we all want to be like one day. God bless the name and memory of Margaret Elisabeth Bird. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.