

LISTENING ALONGSIDE



ECHOING CHRIST

Lenten Devotions 2017

**Tuesday,
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Songbirds

By Elizabeth Edwards

song·bird /'sôNG,bərd/ noun

Merriam-Webster: a bird that utters a succession of musical tones; a female singer

The Urban Dictionary: Anyone who consciously looks for the best in all people, places, and things

Some of my earliest and fondest memories involve hearing my grandmothers sing.

In her early years, my maternal grandmother, who will turn 90 in May, played guitar and sang on live radio shows. By the time I came along, her singing was reserved mainly for the gospel songs of the choir in her Pentecostal country church where she still sings whenever she is able to attend worship. Strains of *I'll Fly Away*, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, and *I Saw the Light*, accompanied by the strumming of her guitar, helped me early to love worship and to understand faith as something to be both sung and lived. My first experience of leading in worship was standing on a box, as an 8 year old, so that I could be seen over the pulpit, singing *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* in duet with my grandmother at the Fifth Sunday Night Singspiration. I remember how encouraging she was when I told her I was nervous, and how proud I was to stand next to her. I thought she had the loveliest voice I had ever heard.

My paternal grandmother could not carry a tune in a bucket, but she did love to sing! She sang the old Methodist hymns of her upbringing with fervor: *Blessed Assurance*, *Jesus is Mine . . . Rock of Ages Cleft for Me . . . We've a Story to Tell to the Nations . . . My Jesus I Love Thee . . .* No one would have called her singing beautiful. The notes were often cracked and out of tune, but there was a steady devotion, a soothing familiarity, and a quiet joy about her singing. Her songs taught me that faith was not to be confined within

the walls of the church, as she crooned verse after verse while she went about her chores, worked in her garden, or rocked babies to sleep. Memories of waking on countless mornings, nestled in her down pillows and hand-sewn quilts, to the smell of biscuits in the oven and sounds of hymns ringing from the kitchen, remind me of the sturdy faith on which she relied. She died when I was just fourteen. I would give almost anything to hear those off-key melodies from her voice again.

The faith that was sung and lived by these two songbirds has, in fundamental ways, shaped nearly every aspect of my life. God spoke to me through them over and over in my childhood as I experienced and claimed faith for myself, began to explore my own gifts and interests, and ultimately answered God's call to ministry. I have no doubt that their voices continue to reverberate in my heart and mind in my passion for working with young people, my love of worship and music and poetry, the endless list of projects I always have underway, my love of cooking, and maybe even my new-found fondness for gardening. With each passing year, I recognize more ways that their words, their examples, their songs, and their faith echo through my own life. And as I continue to listen for their voices, I pray that on my best days, my life might echo the faith I heard them sing.

Prayer

Lord of life, sing through me.

Give my heart a melody so sweet and pure, good and true
That I may offer a song to You.

Come to me and still my fear until my song is Yours alone.

Sing through me, Lord of Life; make my voice Your own!

Lord of life, pray through me.

Fill my mind with quiet peace so sweet and pure, good and true,
That I may have only thoughts of You.

Come to me and still my doubt until my dreams are Yours alone.

Pray through me, Lord of Life; make my mind Your own!

Lord of life, live through me.

Keep my soul in harmony so sweet and pure, good and true,
That through my living I'll honor You.

Come to me and still my will until my deeds are Yours alone.

Live through me, Lord of life; make my heart Your own!

–Deborah Dresie

Prayer of Consecration

Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

II Timothy 1:3-7

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.