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TRIBUTE

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EXCERPTS FROM

JANUARY 7, 2013, MEMORIAL SERVICE

Reverend Margaret A. Ball*

I don't know how many of you here today remember how the winter of 1991 started here in Oklahoma City. It was a really very typical autumn. Things were beginning to cool down just like they normally do. By the latter part of October, some of the leaves of the trees were just beginning to turn. For the most part, almost all the plants were still pretty green. Well, things were going along on a very normal schedule weather-wise here in Oklahoma City, but then on the very last day of October, a very abnormal thing happened. We had a hard, hard freeze, and it lasted several days. It was kind of a freakish thing. Most of the plants really hadn't had the time to prepare themselves for the onset of winter, and all at once, winter was here, and winter was here in spades.

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Because so many of the plants were still green at that time, there was a lot of speculation throughout the winter—those of us who love plants and are graced by their beauty were concerned about what’s going to happen next spring. Are they going to survive this horrible, horrible winter? But we just had to exercise our patience and wait and see what happened. Well, that spring did come. The spring of 1992 was a riot of beautiful flowers, bushes, flowering quince, the yellows of forsythia, all the wonderful glories of the red bud trees—everything was out and beautiful. The plants had survived that winter, and they were not only proclaiming the beauty of God’s world and God’s creation, but they were offering a visible witness to the strength of life over death.

Well, I wonder today if we may not feel a little bit like those plants in 1991. Bill had dealt with health issues over many years, but it always seemed like he was able to bounce back. He would always come back from something that seemed so dire and so difficult. And so in the midst of us beginning to just expect he would always do that, this does feel very sudden for us; we weren’t prepared for it, we were all in shock. We didn’t really have time to brace ourselves for this. And so, we wonder if we, too, will ever recover from this pain, this grief that came so abruptly. So, today, I want to remind you of those plants that survived the winter of 1991 because God created them with the resources to be able to withstand the ravages of harsh winter. And I want to remind you that God has created us in the same way: with the resources to withstand the difficulty of this difficult time so that we can emerge from this winter of our lives at the appropriate time. There’s much healing to be done in the midst of this pain, and some of it will take a long, long time.

My hope is that today, during this service, we can begin to take some of those first steps into the springtime that we’re looking for in our lives. The best way I know for that to happen is to share some special stories about why Bill was so important to us and to God’s world. This telling of stories is an important part of a memorial service, for that’s what we’re here to do today—to memorialize the one we love so much.

We want to remember him, but I want to remind you there’s a longer or a broader sense of the word “remembering.” Break it down for just a minute. Part of what we’re here to do today is to re-member him: to claim him again as a part of this group of people who love him so very, very much; as a part of this family who adored him. We will continue to always have him as a member of all that we are, of all the communities that he has touched. Today we re-member him in our hearts as well.

2013] *Excerpts from January 7, 2013, Memorial Service* **3**

Bill's life was incredibly rich. I'm sure that all of us here would aspire to live such a life: highly respected attorney, much loved professor and mentor to students here at OCU's Law School, president of the Oklahoma Bar Association, recipient of innumerable awards, honors, and accolades, and, of course, wonderful friend and loving patriarch of his family.

It was my privilege to work with Bill here at OCU: to get to know him as a dear, dear colleague. And as he dealt with a variety of health issues, I became even more privileged to become his pastor. I learned lots of meaningful things about Bill during visits at the hospital, including the deep and abiding faith that undergirded his life. But, you know, I learned some new things about Bill when I was visiting with his family last week. Did you know that Bill absolutely loved Elvis *and* that he did a great Elvis impersonation? Now, wouldn't you have loved to have seen that? George said that he and Bill saw Elvis at the *Louisiana Hayride* when they were still teenagers, and Bill came away saying, "This is the coolest guy ever." They told me that Erin said the first time she ever saw her dad cry was the day the news came on that Elvis had died. I also learned that Bill had a file of scriptures and other inspirational readings that were in his own handwriting; page after page of words of encouragement and hope that he no doubt turned to over and over again. I learned that his children, like the OCU Law students, also saw him as a wise mentor. They said his guidance and approval meant everything to them, and he could always be counted on to close a conversation with "*Carpe diem*," reminding them to seize the day.



This picture was taken at the Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club's Boomerang Tournament. Bill and his brother, George, entered the tournament that year as team partners. Bill's wife, Sherry, loves this cute picture of the two brothers. She was in charge of coordinating their attire for the three-day tournament! Needless to say the boys got a few jabs from fellow golfers!