

“Whispering the Lyrics”

Date: May 21, 2017

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: romans 8:1-8; John 14:15-27

Occasion: Easter 6

Theme: Obedience; listening for God’s voice

There were these two elderly people living in Florida in a mobile home park. He was a widower and she a widow. They had known each other for a number of years. Now, one evening there was a community supper in the big activity center in the mobile home park. And these two people sat across the table from each other.

As the meal went on, he made a few admiring glances at her and finally gathered up the courage to ask her, “Will you marry me?” After about six seconds of consideration, she answered, “Yes. Yes, I will.” The meal ended with a few more pleasant exchanges and they went to their respective homes.

Next morning, the gentleman woke up and he was troubled. “Did she say *yes*, or did she say *no*? He couldn’t remember. Try as he could, he just couldn’t recall. Not even a faint memory. With more than a little anxiety, he went to the phone and he called her.

First, he explained to her that he didn’t remember as well as he used to. Then, he reviewed the lovely evening just past. As he gained a little more courage, he then asked her, “When I asked if you would marry me, did you say “yes” or did you say “no?”

He was delighted to hear her say, “Why, I said *yes, yes I will*. And I meant it with all my heart.” Then she continued. “I am so glad you called. Because I couldn’t remember who had asked me.”

A lot of us are having trouble remembering things as well as we used to. And it’s not just the elderly who are having a hard time with

their memories. Maybe it's because we are so busy, or maybe it's because there is so much information that we're asked to absorb every day. Or maybe it's simply because we're human.

And a part of being human is the fact that most of us don't have a perfect memory. We forget things. Sometimes we even forget *important* things and we need to be reminded. Jesus knew and understood that people are forgetful. And so He promised to send the Holy Spirit to remind us of all that He said and did. *That* is one of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit, to remind us of what Jesus taught.

There's an interesting story that's told about an old rhythm and blues singer by the name of Jimmy Reed. Reed played the guitar *and* sang *and* played the harmonica. He really got into his music, so much so that sometimes he forgot the words to his own songs.

If you can find some of the old 45 records of his music, you can hear, ever so faintly, the sound of a woman's voice murmuring just in advance of the next verse of the song. The story goes that Reed would become so absorbed in the throbbing guitar riffs of his music, that he simply couldn't remember the words to his songs.

The woman's voice that you hear on his records is none other than his wife, coaching her husband by whispering the upcoming stanza into his ear as he sang.

As Christians, we notice a strong similarity between Reed's wife and the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus tells us right here in John's Gospel, that the role of the Holy Spirit is, in effect, to whisper the words of the Gospel into the ears of the faithful believer. Here's how it works:

Jesus could no longer be present, in the flesh, to coach us on how to live. So He sent the Holy Spirit to guide us and to coach us.

Now you would think it would be easy to remember what Jesus taught. For example, he told his disciples to love one another, just as He had loved them. But people are prone to forget, forgetting even the simple lessons that Jesus gave us.

He told us to love one another, and still we forget to do that. Jesus told us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And we sometimes forget to do that with the very people we live with. Yeah. Sometimes we can be kinder and nicer to people in public than we are to our own wives, husbands and children. The Holy Spirit whispers into our ears, "Love one another." And we are reminded.

In John's Gospel reading this morning, Jesus is talking to his disciples during the Last Supper. He tells them, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." What did Jesus say were the two great commandments? Do you remember?

"You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and mind and soul and strength." And the second one? - "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The role of the Holy Spirit is to whisper the lyrics of the Gospel into the ears of the forgetful followers of Jesus. That's you and me. We are the forgetful followers. We come to church on Sundays, and we sing and pray and we tell God how much we love the Lord.

And we do. We mean it when we say it in church. And when we leave the church building, we intend to love our neighbors as ourselves. But then we forget. So the Holy Spirit has to remind us. If you love your wife, if you love your husband, then you'll show it.

You'll be more patient with your children. You'll give a little more of yourself to the community, because that's what Jesus would want you to do. The Holy Spirit speaks to us and says, "If it's not going to be you, then who will do it?"

Yes, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict us of what the right thing to do is. And it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict us of the wrong we have done. The Holy Spirit is our teacher, our guide, our coach.

And you know it still amazes me how the Holy Spirit will come and help us when we ask. At times the Holy Spirit will come even without my asking. But I know that I am much more receptive to the Spirit when I do ask.

There is a cartoon character called Pontius Puddle. In the first frame of this particular comic strip, Pontius is seen thinking aloud to himself. "I wonder if God can really hear me." The next frame shows Pontius praying, "Hey God! What should I do with my life?"

In the third frame, there is a voice from Heaven saying, "Feed the hungry! Right injustice! Work for peace!" In the fourth frame Pontius answers back to Heaven, "I was just testing, God." And then in the final frame God answers back, "Same here."

You know, the more I think about it, it's not that we have trouble remembering what Jesus taught. And the problem isn't that we can't hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. No, more often than not, I think we don't like what we hear and do remember. Because often when God speaks it means we must change.

And that is exactly what the Gospel is all about, change. The Spirit speaks and convicts us of our sin. We repent and ask

forgiveness. God offers it to us in the gift of Jesus. And then the Spirit speaks and helps us to change, helps us to be different, helps us to be more like Jesus.

And yes, when we forget, the Holy Spirit whispers the lyrics of God's will for us into our ears. And with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are given the power to love like Jesus asked us to. Now, let us remember the lyrics and remember to love one another. In doing so, we will be keeping the commandments. Amen? Amen!