

“Whispering the Lyrics”

Date: May 17, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

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

Occasion: Easter 6, year A

Theme: Listening for God’s voice; Holy Spirit; God’s Presence

As many of you know, I like to get away with my kayak and spend time on the water. Sometimes I go with a group of people and sometimes I like to go by myself. I can get away from everything and everybody and just enjoy the peace and quiet that only being alone can bring.

Sometimes I pray or meditate while I’m sitting outdoors inside my kayak. Or else, I might just enjoy noticing all of the nature that is around me while I’m sitting in my boat. God’s presence is all around me in the stillness and the quiet of the day.

But you know, there is a big difference between being *alone* and being *lonely*. Andre Johnson wrote an article in the most recent edition of *Christian Century* magazine and he tells this story. He said he and his wife Lisa were watching the nightly news and they saw a feature story about children waiting to be adopted.

One child said that he would like to find a home because he was tired of telling people that the other kids he lived with were “just my foster brother or sister.” Having been in the foster care system practically all of his life, he knew that his relationship with any foster family could end at any time.

He wanted to be with a family, to feel as if he was part of something. He was around people all of the time, but he was lonely, and he was tired of it. Mr. Johnson goes on to say: “We all want the same things this boy did. We want to be part of something. We want

to be around people who love us. Like the little boy, we don't want to be lonely. We want to be loved, cared for, supported, uplifted and embraced. No one truly wants to be lonely." (*Christian Century*, May 2020)

During this sheltering-in-place, caused by covid-19, many of us have begun to feel lonely, missing the companionship of other people. We know how this little boy feels. No one wants to feel lonely.

So, back to our Gospel lesson: Jesus has already told his disciples that he must leave, to go and prepare a place for them. He knows this will not sit too well with them. He knows they will be hurt and they will wrestle with feeling alone, perhaps feeling abandoned.

They will have to battle episodes of feeling lonely and depressed. This isn't going to be easy for them. So, Jesus gives them a promise. Jesus says that God will leave them an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the counselor, the promise of God's presence.

Jesus, in essence, is saying, "I am *not* leaving you alone. I am *not* leaving you to fend for yourselves. I am asking God to send the Advocate, the counselor, the helper – to be with you and to guide you. To move in you and to work in you, to sustain you and to free you to be all that God has called you to be."

This passage reminds us we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is with us. The Spirit is always present – there to comfort and to reassure us. We are being led and guided by the Spirit. We are NOT alone. The Holy Spirit reminds us of this promise Jesus has given us, that we are not alone.

But sometimes we forget. Sometimes it *does* feel like we're all alone. Sometimes it *does* feel as if God has forgotten about us. This

then, is the work of the Holy Spirit – to remind us of what we have forgotten.

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* he sang *and* he 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, and to remind us that we are not alone. God is with us, always!!

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 know God is with us, and yet we forget. Yes, sometimes we feel like that little boy on the news, we may believe there is no one out there for us, no one out there in the

universe who cares for us. I must admit, there are times when I feel this way, and I wonder if God has forgotten about us.

But I don't wonder for too long, because that's when I hear the Holy Spirit whisper the lyrics into my ear. "You are God's Beloved Child. He has promised to be with you, even to the end of the ages. Trust in His love. Trust in His grace." How reassuring.

I'd like to conclude by sharing this cute story. Mee Spousler of the Mount Hope UMC in Aston Pennsylvania tells how she was trying to put her three-year old son to bed for a nap. When she was unsuccessful, she put him in her bed and layed down next to him to encourage him to sleep.

She fell asleep, but guess what. He didn't. When she woke up, she saw him sitting on a chair at the end of the bed. She asked him, "Luke, what are you doing?"

"I'm playing God," he replied.

"What do you mean, you're playing God?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "I'm watching over you while you sleep."

Out of the mouth of children comes wisdom. They understand more than we give them credit for. My friends, God IS watching over us. Jesus gave us that promise when he gave us the Holy Spirit.

Not only will God watch over us, but through the presence and reminder of the Holy Spirit, we have the reassurance that God is with us. We are not alone. And when we forget, the Holy Spirit whispers the lyrics of God's love for us into our ears.

Friends, I know it's hard being separated. No one likes it. But please be reminded that God is with us, always. Sleep in peace, knowing that God is watching over you. Amen."