

Trinity Church (ELCA)

Stephens City, Virginia

Sunday's Sermon

May 1, 2016

The Rev. Mr. Cameron P. Keyser

Easter 7-C

Just take those old records off the shelf - I'll sit and listen to 'em by myself. You know: today's music just ain't got the same soul...I like that old time rock 'n' roll.

Call me a 'relic' - call me what you will...say I'm 'old-fashioned,' say I'm "over the hill..." but, today's music ain't got the same soul - still like that old time rock 'n' roll...

Most credit Ed Sullivan with introducing Elvis Presley to the world in 1956. but, it was really band leaders Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey on their "Stage Show:" January 28, 1956. He was on NBC's *Milton Berle Show* on April 3...Steve Allen featured Elvis on July 1... Sullivan didn't actually snag him until September 9!

So, now that we've cleared up that 'life-sustaining' myth, let me ask you: If you're over 45 or so, where were you - exactly - at 8 o'clock, Sunday night, February 9th, 1964?

Well, my extra sensory perception tells me you were among 73 million others - 2/5ths of the total U.S. population at the time - tuned to CBS and the *The Ed Sullivan Show* - again!

The first song you heard was: *All My Kavin* - and, if you were with a bunch of girls - like I was and could still hear *anything* after their never-before-experienced ear-splitting screams - you heard 4 more: *Till There Was You*, *She Loves You*, *I Saw Her Standing There*, and *I Want To Hold Your Hand*. That's when America finally surrendered to the British...and to the Beatles.

Rock-and-roll - despite what all the media hype this week might have led you to believe - wasn't ushered in only a decade ago by Prince - God rest his little purple soul...or by Ozzie Osborne - who has turned out to be one funny, funny old man - I wonder why?...or even Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. It was Elvis' gyrating hips, and the mop-like hair of the Beatles who propelled us into what so many parents feared was the end of their children's 'innocence' - and, in many ways, I guess they were right - especially when they heard the Kingsmen's scandalous "Louie, Louie." Mom and Pop were sure they knew what it meant. But, we never did - and still don't!

They should have been more attentive to "The House of the Rising Sun." Now that we understood!

I could go on for hours: Otis Reding's "Sittin' On the Dock of the Bay" ... "Under the Boardwalk"...The Temptations and the Beach Boys and The 4-Tops..."My Girl" and "I Heard It Through the Grapevine..."

Ahhh... the great old days of rock-n-roll...

But, there was another artist who you may not have heard of unless you were also into a little Rhythm and Blues...his name was Jimmy Reed: son of a share-cropper who brought the throbbing harmonica-and-guitar-driven rhythm-and-blues of the Mississippi Delta into the rock-and-roll mainstream. Tom Long - in his book *Whispering the Lyrics* - shares the 'back story' to Jimmy Reed's recordings: "When you play him over and over again," Long begins, "if you listen carefully, there seems to be - ever so faintly in the background - a soft woman's voice: murmuring in advance the next few lyrics. The story that grew up around this was that Jimmy - so absorbed in his music- simply couldn't remember the words; he needed help - and he got it from his wife: whispering the upcoming stanzas into his ear."

Long believes that's what the Holy Spirit does for us: "Keep my commandments," Jesus says to the disciples this morning - as he approaches his death, "and the Father will give you an Advocate to be with you forever. This is the spirit of truth ..." which - as Long says - "whispers the lyrics of the good news of the gospel in our ears - reminding us of Christ's commandments - and jogging our memories to the never-ending hymn of faithful obedience."

So often, tho,' the Spirit comes off so much 'bigger and badder:' like the "rush of a mighty wind..." in "unknown tongues," jumping and gyrating and whooping and hollering - rolling down the aisle: 'filled' with the Spirit...

Well, I guess it might if you need that kind of spiritual support. Never hit *me* that way, and I *think* I'm glad...

The Spirit comes to me more as a quiet, whispering teacher: the help I get standing in a hospital hall: having no idea what to say to those in deep distress on the other side of the door...in the composition of a sermon: when jumbled-up words and thoughts desperately need organization and direction...in a fervent prayer - when I sense a gentle whisper in the back of my mind: "It's gonna' be OK. I got this..."

That's the experience of the "Advocate" I've had - and of the "Peace" Jesus promises to give this morning: a relationship more like that in the book *The Shack*: where author William Paul Young presents the Holy Spirit

as a friendly, down-to-earth African-American female: a light, wistful, free-flowing character who shows up in the most unlikely of places, and at the most unlikely of times... and whose name is – aptly: “Grace.”

There’s an old spiritual that begins: "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child..." We’ve sung it to ourselves from time to time as we live with the isolation and the alienation when the world becomes just too much for us. I gotta’ admit: the way things have been going in our culture of late, I’ve been feeling the same way. There’s an actual name for it: the “dark night of the soul” – a very real element in the life of the religious: where the sense of the *absence* of God is as real as the Divine *presence*. Read the psalms and note the alternating sense of Divine presence and absence...it’s like being an orphan.

And, there are many who feel they are: the 50-year-old steelworker in Pittsburgh - laid off because the plant is closing: too old to get another job...not worth the expense of re-training, they say. Is there anyone to whisper to *him* the words of Christ: "I will not leave you an orphan"?

In the hospital isolation wing: the man with AIDS - hard even to find hospital staff who’ll empty the wastebasket. Who is there to remind *him* that he will not be left an orphan?

It’s *supposed* to be you and me: living out the Good News that comes with our Baptism: empowered by the Spirit, *we* are the way Christ makes his presence known and his comfort felt: “*God’s* work...*Our* hands...” And, because Christ comes to us faithfully in the whisperings of the Spirit, in the reading and preaching of the Word, and in the breaking of bread and sharing of cup, *we* can *do* that!

He comes in that hug at the Peace, in that phone call you just ‘randomly’ made – which turns out to be precisely when someone needed it...the word of ‘thanks’ you get when you least expect it – and can’t even remember why they’re thanking you.

Christ seeks to come to all the world through us until no one feels orphaned or alone: to the unemployed and desperate, to the rejected and oppressed, to the

fearful and misunderstood - to your partner in the pew, and to your neighbor down the street: Christ - broken in the bread and present in our midst – challenges *us* to be broken and shared: to live as a sacrament of God’s faithfulness and generosity to a world in need.

But, we Christians are notoriously forgetful. Like Jimmy Carter, we get caught up in the ‘rhythm of *religion*,’ but forget the lyrics of ‘*faith*.’ We know we’re created to serve and love one another, but, so often, we conveniently forget... seeming to *choose* to ‘forget:’ to forget “Whose” we are – preferring the oblivion of amnesia to the hard work of discipleship.

But, if we’re open to it, God’s Spirit whispers in our ear: telling us what we cannot - or will not – remember: refreshing our memory about who we are and to whom we belong...the Spirit “whispering the lyrics in our ear.”

Happened to Jimmy Carter one Sunday morning on the campaign trail, coming out of worship at the First Baptist Church of Plains, when a reporter shouted out: “Suppose when you’re President, you get into a situation where the laws of the U. S. are in conflict with what you understand to be the Will of God – which will you follow: the laws of the *State* - or the commandments of *God*?”

Put yourself in Carter’s place – that was the same kind of question the Pharisees asked Jesus: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor – or not?” Apparently, whichever way he answered, his goose would be cooked.

Carter – obviously surprised at the question - stopped, looked up - blinking into the bright Georgia sun – and, maybe with the Spirit gently whispering the lyrics into his ears - replied, “I would obey the commandments of God.”

That – the pundits tell us – played a major role in his defeat – because, *you* know how it is fellow Christians: we just *talk* about these things – we don’t really *do* them – *certainly* not in *public*.

Carter the politician should have avoided the question – and he was bountifully able to do just that... but Carter, the *Christian*, had the Spirit of Christ whispering in his ear asking: “So, do you love me? How much?...”

Can you hear it, too? Amen.

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