

Pilgrim United Church of Christ
New Bedford, MA
Rev. David M. Hammett

April 27, 2008
Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 14:15-21

"Above a Whisper"

The painters arrived this week and work got underway – it's already looking better in here. I got to meet Dick, the crew boss, when Wayne asked him to take a look at a nasty crack in the wall in my office. Dick saw my bass guitar leaning against the wall and exclaimed, "Oh ... a rock 'n roller!" "Yes," I replied, "I have a checkered past." That got a chuckle out of Dick.

I was never a very serious rock musician, but did have a good time with my buddies in the mid-seventies reviving some of the rock 'n roll favorites of the late 50's and early 60's. The movie, "American Graffiti" had just come out and the more innocent music of the early rock 'n roll days became popular again. We played to the best of our garage-band ability (actually, we were a basement band), wearing black leather jackets and slicking our hair back with Brillcream. We tried to imitate the sound of the Diamonds ("Little Darlin'"), Danny and the Juniors ("At the Hop"), Del Shannon ("Runaway"), Bill Haley and the Comets ("Rock Around the Clock") and even some Beach Boys ("Ba ba ba Babara Ann"). People said we sounded pretty good, but then, those people were mostly our families and friends.

If you remember the music of that era, perhaps even had a collection of well-worn 45's, you might remember Jimmy Reed. He was a hard-driving rhythm-and-blues musician who rose out of the poverty of Mississippi to stardom in the mid-fifties with songs like, "Baby, What You Want Me To Do" and "Honest I Do". They say that if you listen really close to his recordings you'll hear, faintly in the background, the whispering voice of a woman prompting Jimmy with the words. They say he got so wrapped up in playing that he couldn't remember the words to his own songs. That background voice was his wife, Mama Reed, whispering the lyrics, guiding the music.

"Let those who have ears, hear", said Jesus: listen. He prayed that the Holy Spirit would guide the believers, would prompt their Gospel-song. John 14:16-17:

"The Father will give you an Advocate to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

In you – in me – the very voice of God breathed through the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Guide, prompting the words of life. Listen.

I think church is about listening, about coming in from the world's busyness that consumes the rest of our week, coming in to hopefully hear something, a whisper of the Spirit, the Word of God, so we can get the rest of our words right. We need the peace the Spirit offers that hushes the clamor and touches the soul. Jesus said (vss. 25-26):

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

And what is it that the Holy Spirit reminds us, but that nothing matters more than our relationship with God and that we are here for the purpose of fulfilling Christ's teaching of love.

"If anyone loves me, they will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

Amazing thought – God wants to move in with us. God wants to be at home in our hearts and in our words and actions every day. Jesus embodied the Creator's love more clearly than anyone who has ever lived. He shows the way. We know the fullness of God in Christ. His Spirit seeks to be at home in us. In the eighth chapter of the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul put it this way:

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by that Spirit we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

The Spirit testifies with our spirit – whispers the words to us so that we might get it right, inspires us to cry out to God, welcomes us into God's family.

That's why the welcome we offer here matters so much – the welcome we extend to newcomers and to the folks we've known for years. It is the fulfillment of God's welcome.

So listen, listen intently for the Spirit. Speak the Spirit's words of justice, kindness, patience, understanding, consolation, reconciliation, healing, peace, joy, love. Let God's love be obvious in everything you say and do. Let the Gospel song play. Let the Spirit's whisper sing through you.