



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Third Sunday After Easter, May 15th, 2011

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

In today's Communion Gospel, Jesus' disciples remind me of the guy who was terribly worried about his wife's hearing. It seemed to be getting worse and worse. So he went to his doctor and asked what he should do. The doctor told him that, first, he needed to get an idea of the seriousness of the problem. "Go into the room in the house furthest away from her and ask a simple question," said the doctor, "If she fails to hear you, go into a room that's a bit closer and try again. Keep it up until she hears you. This will give us a rough idea how serious her hearing loss is."

When the guy got home his wife was in the kitchen, so he went into the drawing room and shouted: "Doris, what's for dinner?" No reply. So he went into his study: "Doris, what's for dinner?" No reply. He moved to the family room and then the dining room with the same result. Finally, he went into the kitchen. "Doris, what's for dinner?" he asked. "For the fifth time," she said, "It's meat loaf."

Like the man in the story, the disciples hadn't heard what Jesus had been telling them quite plainly for best part of three years. The exchange between Jesus and his disciples took place

during the Last Supper, the night before his crucifixion. Their bemusement is truly surprising because Jesus had been talking to them about what would happen after he his death for most of the evening. Indeed, he had spent the entire final week of his earthly life explaining what was coming down the pike to anyone who would listen.

The fact that they failed to understand what he was telling them isn't so unusual. It's not just a very common human failing. It has been with us from the very start.

No one was more surprised than Adam and Eve, for example, when they learned that eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge had landed them in deep, deep trouble.

They were absolutely certain God would be overjoyed to discover they were as wise as he was.

The trouble is not so much that our hearing is bad – like the guy in the story. It's more that we seem to be singularly inept at tuning into God's wavelength. Thus, we constantly misconstrue what he's saying, we deceive ourselves into believing that he wants what we want, that he

thinks the way we think, and that his goals are our goals – all notions he’s told us, repeatedly and categorically, are quite untrue.

Putting things right is not as simple as it might, at first, seem. The guy in the story could solve his problem simply by buying a hearing aid. There really is no such thing as a hearing aid when it comes to listening to God. The only way to tune into God’s wavelength is through constant practice.

This involves learning to pray properly. Prayer is, at its most basic, should be a conversation with God. This might seem a banal statement of the obvious. But conversation is a two way street. It is defined in the dictionary as: “an informal interchange of thoughts, information, etc., by spoken words; oral communication between persons; talk; colloquy.” By this standard, most folks don’t converse with God. They simply drop off a shopping list on the way to the mall.

All too often our prayers sound more like a shopping list than a conversation. It doesn’t matter whether we are praying for ourselves or for others. We go to God with our list of wants and when he doesn’t immediately deliver things in the way we have mapped out for him, we pout and say that he hasn’t answered our prayers. We forget that when we pray we are asking for his will to be done, not for our will to be done. We also forget that God has the option of saying: “No. I’m not doing things your way. I have quite a different solution in mind.”

Because we don’t listen to God, we constantly forget our place in the great scheme of things. We forget that the person with whom we are talking is not just the most powerful being in the Universe, he also the most wise: infinitely wise, all knowing, in fact. Thus most of our prayers

are simply a waste of breath because God knows what we need long before we are aware of the need existing.

The true purpose of prayer is not to drop off your shopping list, but to establish a relationship with the shopkeeper. Prayer is our telephone line to the Almighty and to spend prayer time telling him what he already knows is a sad waste of time. When the disciples asked Jesus how they should pray, they probably expected him to lay down an elaborate ritual with all sorts of complicated formulae and obeisances. Instead, he gave them the simplest prayer imaginable: the prayer we call “The Lord’s Prayer.” What a downer!

But the Lord’s Prayer says it all: As far as petitions go, really nothing more needs to be added. Indeed, intercessory prayer is not so much for God’s benefit as our own. We forget that God is already well aware of our needs. The real value of our intercessions is they remind us of our own duties and obligations.

The Lord’s Prayer, because it says it all, is a perfect introduction to the important business of prayer – the business of establishing that close personal relationship with God, the business of listening to what God has to tell us. Bible study is a great help in this regard for it enables us to understand what God is saying to us.

Even so, it’s important to remember the disciples, who knew their Bibles better than we do spent three whole years listening to God, and they still got things wrong. This is why we need to practice listening. And the best way to do this is to say the Collect For Quiet Confidence and ask the Holy Spirit to lift us to his presence where we may simply “be still and know that he is God.” *AMEN*