

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

Volume XXVII, Number 4

A parish in the classical Anglican tradition

9 February 2016

FROM THE RECTOR

Don't despise moving your lips as you read

A famous English man of letters, reduced by the expense of his vices to writing for a popular tabloid, used to refer disparagingly to his readers as 'people who move their lips when they read'.

The implication, of course, was that folks who sound out the words they are reading are somehow less intelligent than those who don't and are thus unable to appreciate truly great prose.

Actually, this doesn't necessarily follow. Indeed, in the not too distant past in fact, everybody who could read moved their lips as they did so. And they didn't merely move their lips, they actually read right out loud – even when they were all alone and the only ones to hear what was being read.

This wasn't simply a habit of the folks Karl Marx dubbed the '*lumpen proletariat*'. Everybody did it, and not just real oldies like The Venerable Bede and Geoffrey Chaucer – or even middling oldies like Thomas Cranmer, Sir Thomas Moore, Ben Johnson and William Shakespeare.

The fact of the matter is that the practice went on into the 19th and early 20th Century. Herman Melville, William Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson and Charles Dickens and even modernists like Rudyard Kipling – all of them moved their lips as they read.

Such observations might sound a trifle eccentric. Here in America, the Queen's English isn't an obsession. We are plain-spoken people. But the truth of the matter is the British aren't obsessed with the Queen's English either. They, too, consider it a virtue to be plain-spoken.

The trouble is, however, being plain-spoken doesn't necessarily mean that one speaks plainly. Quite to the contrary, in fact. Our televisions provide object lessons in this on a daily basis.

Next time you watch a TV interview count the 'ums' and 'ahs', 'likes' and 'sort ofs' the interviewee utters. Then try to recall how much of the message they were trying to get across was actually expressed in their own words and how much of it you deduced or extrapolated.

It is a rather depressing exercise – for it graphically illustrates how inarticulate we, as a nation, have become.

The fact that President Obama is generally considered to be one of the nation's most eloquent public speakers is another example of our declining articulacy. It is not that he is a bad speaker, far from it. He is certainly among the best we have.

But neither he nor any of his contemporaries (President Clinton springs to mind) are able to approach the economical elegance, say, of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

William Shakespeare barely had a Sixth Grade education. He wrote not for the gentry and intellectuals, but for the scum of the earth – the seething, swearing mob who would as cheerfully have watched a bear baited in Southwark or a traitor hung, drawn and quartered at Tower Hill.

But back then, the scum of the earth were not only better able to express themselves than a majority of today's 'cognitive elite', they understood every word that Shakespeare wrote. Yet today the Bard confounds and flummoxes English majors even at our great universities.

This isn't because the words have changed in meaning since Shakespeare's day, Ninety eight percent of them have precisely the same meaning as they had in the 16th Century. Nor are his plots obscure and time-dated. Not a bit of it: The TV soap operas routinely plagiarise Shakespeare.

Today's English majors fail to understand Will Shakespeare because they lack the vocabulary to do so – a state of affairs that cannot be explained by a lack of investment in education, to one parent families, to something in the water, or to anything else that will cost vast sums of money to put right.

It has come to pass because we no longer move our lips when we read; because we no longer read out loud. And this, in turn, has come about because reading aloud is no longer a pleasure – a primary

source of recreation.

The phenomenon was entirely to be expected, of course – a natural by-product not of the radio and television age, but of the industrial revolution.

From a business perspective, it simply isn't efficient to read aloud. It would take far too much time to read the operating instructions for a computer aloud. Reading invoices and bank statements aloud would be ludicrous.

Reading aloud was dying even in its Victorian heyday. Radio gave it a new, albeit tenuous, lease on life, before television arrived to bump it off completely.

In the communications industry, some folks make a virtue of our linguistic decline – contending that a picture is worth a thousand words. But if that were really so we would still be scrawling on the walls of caves.

The consequences of the average American's deteriorating command of the English language has been culturally devastating. For all intents and purposes, poetry is a dead art form, the preserve of a tiny, ever-decreasing coterie of *cognoscenti*.

The Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Hilarie, Jack, Cal, Phyllis, Edie, Bill, Terry, Helen, Jim, Adele, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Rosemary, Robert

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Scott, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Ned, Cindy, Anne, David

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN

Great 19th century writers like Melville, Dickens, Austen and the Brontes survive courtesy of Public Television. Even Hollywood's offerings have suffered. Just compare the scripts of *The Man Who Came to Dinner* with any modern comedy and the *I Love Lucy* show with today's sit coms.

But if the price of linguistic decline has been high in the realms of education and entertainment, the cost in the spiritual sphere has been devastating. We are, in many respects, losing our ability to communicate with God.

The problem isn't that we no longer use old fashioned words like 'thee' and 'thou' and 'wouldest' and 'saith' (as in 'thus saith the Lord') – though such words constantly remind us of the 'otherness' of God.

The real problem is that our disregard for the language we speak makes it difficult for us marshal our thoughts about Him and the sort of relationship we ought to have with Him.

Modern prayers at best are unmemorable – scarcely the thing that sustains soldiers battle. At worst, they are little better than shopping lists. Yet back in the days when people moved their lips as they read, it was by no means unusual for ordinary people to compose prayers to God.

The key to regaining our lost eloquence is to practice reading aloud – and this means doing a tad more than mumbling the confession on Sunday. **GPH***

FROM THE PARISH LIFE COMMITTEE

Shrove Tuesday Supper on 9 February

Saint Stephen's Shrove Tuesday Pancake & Sausage Supper takes place on 9 February at 5.00pm. These famous suppers are not only gastronomic events, they are also real inflation fighters. The price has remained unchanged for 26 years. We challenge you to find anything in Baltimore with a comparable record!

For a mere \$5 per adult you can feast on scrumptious pancakes and a heaping helping of the finest sausages the city has to offer. (You could manage seconds? Be our guest!) Naturally, there will be lashings of syrup, butter, and apple sauce, with low calorie equivalents for folks watching their weight. Beverages will be available at nominal cost. Kids under 12 can tuck in for half price (\$2.50) for the first two, and the other kids you bring along – your own or anyone else's – eat free.

We challenge you to find a better deal in town than that! It can't be done! We have managed to hold our prices steady without compromising quality because the Pancake Suppers are not fund raisers but family affairs aimed at fostering fellowship and fun. If we make a profit, it's entirely accidental.

Join us for fellowship, fun and fantastically good food at this year's Pancake and Sausage Supper. It's the best value in Baltimore. Doors open at 5.00pm and close at 7.30pm.

THE LENTEN STUDY

The English Church and English-speaking people

This year's Lenten Study will explore the extraordinary influence of the unique relationship between the ancient English Church and people has had not just on our own nation, but on English-speaking peoples throughout the world – even those who do not share our Christian faith.

The first of the five-part series will begin after Evening Prayer at 6.45pm on Wednesday, 17 February, and will continue at the same time on each Wednesday evening until 17 March. Each session will be completely contained so you can miss one but not lose the thread of the story.

As usual we will be offering you both food for both body and soul – not least a choice of hearty soups, beverages and the best bread in Baltimore. If you think that you'll need more than that, just bring a sandwich.

FROM THE LADIES WHO LUNCH

The Ladies Who Lunch will meet at the **Padonia Ale House**, on Wednesday, 17 February. Contact Joyce Perlberg on **410 252 2680**

St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093

Office: 410 560 6776 · Rectory: 410 665 1278

Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Ven. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*

The Ven. Michael Kerouac, *Vicar* · The Rev. Michael Belt,
The Rev. John Novicki, The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*

The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*

Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8 am: Said Eucharist

9.15 am: Choral Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11 am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

6 pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) – evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6 pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5 pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30 pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7 am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10 am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30 am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Tuesday, 9 February, 5 pm

Shrove Tuesday Pancake & Sausage Supper

Wednesday, 10 February, 10 am & 7 pm

Ash Wednesday services

Wednesday, 17 February, 12 noon

The Ladies Who Lunch meet at Padonia Ale House

Wednesday, 17 February, 6.45 pm

Lenten Studies begin

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Timonium, MD 21093

11856 Mays Chapel Road

St Stephen's Anglican Church

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
TIMONIUM MD
PERMIT NO. 181