

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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FROM THE RECTOR

The Bible is a remedy for our short attention spans

You can legitimately blame television for an awful lot of the ills that afflict today's society – the narcissism and self absorption that has contributed to the soaring divorce rate, people's extraordinary preoccupation with sex, the violent crime that afflicts both our inner cities and the suburbs.

But there is another serious problem created by television, i-phones and the related electronic devices that clutter our lives to which nobody seems to be paying attention – our amazing shrinking attention spans.

Thirty five years ago, most parishioners come to church expecting to hear a 25 minute sermon. I didn't say they were looking forward to it – merely that's what they expected.

If, however, I were to have preached a 20-minute sermon, I would have met a chorus of strenuous complaints.

Today, of course, if I were to preach a 20-minute sermon I would still hear complaints – not that the sermon was too short, but that it was much too long. "Did I want to put everybody to sleep?" I would have been asked.

The root cause of this phenomenon, I would suggest, is the ever-shrinking length of time between television advertising breaks. In fact there are so many breaks on some channels they can stretch the viewing time of a 90-minute into close on four hours.

A by product is that if the average sermon goes on for more than 12½ minutes people start fidgeting and nodding off in the pews. Preach beyond 15 minutes, and you're asking for eyes to start glazing over. Stretch it to 17 minutes or so, and sleep at your bidding will creep from pew to pew.

Today it's generally accepted wisdom among our more modern minded clergy that most people are quite unable concentrate sufficiently to grasp the Epistle and Gospel lessons read during services.

A former Archbishop of Canterbury, for example, is on record as saying that scripture readings in the lectionary are far too long for this sound bite age. People simply haven't got attention spans long enough to digest them, therefore, he says, Bible readings should be shortened radically.

This notion is totally wrong-headed. Jesus Christ founded His Church in order to introduce us to God and to teach us about hm and his ways. And he didn't do this simply because it seemed a good idea at the time.

He did so in order that we should be able to take advantage of the salvation that God, through his grace, offers us through His Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

As with any other "special offer," it is essential for us to understand the terms and conditions upon which it is made before we can take advantage of it. And God gave the Church a book in which the terms and conditions are spelled out clearly, precisely and unequivocally. It is called The Bible. In other words, it is wrong to imagine that it is unimportant to read The Bible or listen to it being read.

There isn't any part of The Bible we don't need to read. Even the oldest, antique bits of the Bible are relevant. In order to understand God and his relationship with us, it's necessary to read not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well – from The Book of Genesis at the very beginning to The Book of Malachi at the very end.

Even a story ancient as that of the birth Moses is relevant. When I was a child, back in the days before television, back in the days before sound bites were ever thought of, it children used to play "Moses in the Bullrushes" pretty well as often as they played Cowboys and Indians.

When a friend of mine was little, his sisters added a touch of dramatic reality to the game by putting him into a herring box and launching him out on the Ohio River.

Moses's story explains to us how the world works. If we can understand the events surrounding Moses' life and work,

we can better handle the things that happen to us. The Book of Exodus is, at one level, history – part of the record of how God's chosen people came into being.

But, at a somewhat deeper level, it also provides us with a penetrating insight into how God works and how the world responds to him. It also illustrates the pitfalls that lie ahead of us and indicates the precautions we need to take in order to avoid falling in to them.

The story of Moses requires us to look back to the period, several centuries before his birth, when the children of Israel – Joseph, his brothers and their dependents – arrived in Egypt. This sprawling clan seemed destined only for success.

Joseph had been raised from slavery to the highest position in the land after Pharaoh. His family, some hundreds of people, were welcomed as honored guests.

By the time of Moses, however, everything had changed. Far from being honored guests, the children of Israel were enslaved – and not merely enslaved, but subject to genocidal laws that condemned all their male children to death.

The final few chapters of the Book of Genesis, indicate this

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, Edie, Bill, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Adele, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Robert, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Pam, Cary, Courtney, Marie & Joanna.

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Scott, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Ned, Cindy, Jacob, Casey & Beth

IN MEMORIAM: Steve Jones

FOR THOSE WHO MOURN: His friends here

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

didn't happen accidentally. It reveals that the seeds of the children of Israel's destruction were planted at the very time they moved into rich pasturelands of the Egyptian delta.

While Joseph was highly honored by pharaoh, he was seen by the Egyptians as one of their harshest oppressors. Genesis tells us that he used his God-given knowledge of the forthcoming famine to strip Egypt's independent farmers of their land and livestock, reducing them to the state of feudal vassals.

Joseph confronted them with a terrible choice: Give up all you possess and become a slave or starve to death, along with your wife and children. This sort of behavior is not the best way to win popularity contests. Small wonder the Israelites were hated.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from the story of Moses is that human beings are not very good at learning from past errors. They tend to repeat their mistakes time and time and time again.

This is graphically illustrated by the way in which the Israelites behaved when Pharaoh finally caved-in and agreed to Moses' demands to release them. Indeed, their behavior goes a long way towards explaining why Pharaoh reneged on his promise and – despite the terrible plagues Egypt had suffered -- set off with his army in hot pursuit of them.

The 12th Chapter of Exodus relates that after the death of the Egyptians' first born sons, the Egyptians begged the children of Israel to leave, but before they left the Israelites plundered their Egyptian neighbors, shaking them down for cash and jewelry as the price of their departure.

There is no doubt that the Egyptians had caused the children of Israel appalling suffering. From the legal and moral point of view, reparations were doubtless in order. But while plundering the Egyptians might have been entirely just, but it was hardly calculated to win their love and respect.

Thus, the seeds of enmity sown on the arrival of the children of Israel in Egypt were replanted at their departure.

There's nothing particularly unique about this story of vainglory and greed. It was repeated time and time again throughout the history of ancient Israel, usually with the most tragic consequences.

Sadly, however, vainglory and greed are failings confined by no means to the children of Israel. There is not a people in this world which has not been prone to similar behavior.

Even so, this ugly side of Israel's history helps us understand why St. Paul is so emphatic about commending charity as the greatest of all the Christian virtues.

It also explains why Jesus told us that the way for us to demonstrate our love for God is by loving our fellow men as much as we love ourselves. GPH✠

FROM THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

We need help badly

The Sunday School is in desperate need of people to assist with the nursery during the 9:15 AM service. Current mothers, experienced mothers, stepmothers, mothers to be, foster mothers and men who mother, many hands make light work. Please consider stepping forward and signing up for the rotation. Look for the sign up form in the Church lobby.

DIANE NOVICKI

FROM THE PARISH LIFE COMMITTEE

School drive great success

We received overwhelming support for the May's Chapel Elementary School supplies drive. All the backpacks requested were donated, plus all supplies needed to fill the backpacks. The school nurse, Mrs. Lanier, sent a thank you note expressing the school's gratitude and appreciation. We will seek additional opportunities during the year to support the school.

PRISCILLA HUFFMAN

St Stephen's Anglican Church

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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

8am: Said Eucharist

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

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

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

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Parish Life Committee

Tuesday, September 13th, 7.00 PM

Ladies Who Lunch

Wednesday, September 21st, 12.00 PM

Pappas Restaurant & Sports Bar

The Diocesan Synod

October 4th to October 7th

Trafalgar Day Tea

Thursday, October 8th, 2.00 PM

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

St Stephen's Anglican Church
11856 Mays Chapel Road
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