

St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

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FROM THE RECTOR

Read aloud to get the most fun out of life

A famous English man of letters, reduced by the expense of his vices to writing for a popular tabloid newspaper, 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 and Winston Churchill – all of them moved their lips as they read.

Such observations might sound a trifle eccentric – to be expected from a parson immigrated from a part of the world that time has passed by, but of little relevance to real world.

Here in America, the Queen's English isn't an obsession. Here in America, we are plain-spoken people.

But the truth of the matter is that the British are no longer obsessed with the Queen's English either. They, like their American cousins, believe 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 television sets 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 Presidents Obama and Clinton are generally considered to be two of the nation's most eloquent public speakers is another example of our declining articulacy. It is not that they are bad speakers, far from it.

They are certainly among the best we have. But neither they nor any of their contemporaries are able to approach the economical elegance, say, of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysberg 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 watch a bear baited in Southwark or a traitor hung, drawn and quartered at Tower Hill.

The frightening thing about this is that, back then, the scum of the earth understood every word Shakespeare wrote, yet today he confounds and flummoxes most of the English majors at our great universities.

And 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 plagiarize Shakespeare. Today's English majors fail to understand Will Shakespeare because they lack the vocabulary to do so.

This state of affairs 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.

This should have been expected, of course. It is 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

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: Peter, Hilarie, Edie, Bill, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Robert, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Courtney, Marie, Joanna, Finnie, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, David, Adrian & Michell

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

IN MEMORIAM: David R. Riley, former Choirmaster & Organist

THOSE WHO MOURN: The choir alumni, his colleagues and many friends.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN; MSGT Michael Holter, USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army

bank statements out loud would be utterly 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.

Necessity being the mother of invention, there are in the communications industry folks who would make a virtue of our linguistic decline – contending that the computer is rendering the spoken word obsolete; that a picture is worth a thousand words.

If that were so, as my father once observed, we wouldn't have invented writing. If pictures were really worth a thousand words we would still be scrawling them on the walls of caves.

In truth, the consequences of the average American's deteriorating command of the English language have been culturally devastating.

For all intents and purposes, poetry is a dead art form, the preserve of a tiny, ever-decreasing coterie of *cognicenti*. 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 absolutely 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 have their uses in that they constantly reminded us of the "otherness" of God.

The real problem is that our increasing 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.

Our modern prayers all too frequently reflect this. At best, they are unmemorable – hardly the sort of thing that sustains soldiers in 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.

Crack open the King James Bible and read it aloud to your children or grandchildren. If that seems a tad too pious, read them a little Shakespeare and Dickens.

And if you think that a bit daunting, start off with the Hardy Boys or Harry Potter. You'll be amazed to discover how much fun it is . . . and how much it improves your prayer life. GPH✘

FROM ANNE HAWKINS

It's about time that we held another parish Tea Party

Tea parties are wonderful affairs for meeting new friends and renewing old acquaintances. This is why St Stephen's teas are so popular.

It has been a very long time since we have had a good old fashioned tea party. Things have been so busy of late what with preparing for the Cookie Walk and decorating the church from Christmas (then taking it all down again after the Epiphany) that we just haven't had the time to prepare for one..

However the time has come to put things right. We are planning to start our tea parties again next month. The only variable is the weather. Providing the snow and ice holds off, we will be inviting you to tea in February. If the Balimore weather does not permit, we shall hold one in March for sure. Watch this space for news.

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 Rev. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*
The Venerable Michael Kerouac, *Vicar*
The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki and
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)

11am: 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 Blood Drive

Monday, January 23rd, 1.30 pm to 7.00 pm

Red Cross states: "The need is critical"

Parish Life

Tuesday February 14th, 7.00 pm

Vestry Meeting

Wednesday February 15th, 7.00 pm

Ladies Who Lunch

(To be announced)

Wednesday February 15th, 12.00 pm - 2.00 pm

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