



**ST. STEPHEN'S
ANGLICAN CHURCH**
11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Third Sunday After Easter, May 16th, 2019

**In the Name of the Father ☩ and of the Son
and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.**

Jesus' disciples often 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."

Today's Communion Gospel tells us that Jesus disciples were like the man in the story. They hadn't understood a word of what he'd been telling them for the best part of three years. Indeed, the exchange recorded in St. John's Gospel, didn't take place at the beginning of their association with him or even half way through it. It 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.

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

Nobody, for example, was more surprised than Adam and Eve to find themselves in deep, deep do-do for eating the forbidden fruit. They were sure God would be over the moon to discover they were as wise as he is.

The problem 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 he wants what we want, that he thinks the way we do, 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 at it might at first seem. The guy in the story could solve his problem by buying a hearing aid. But there's no such thing as a hearing aid when it comes to listening to God. Tuning into God's wavelength takes constant practice.

This involves learning to pray properly. Prayer should be a conversation with God. This might seem a statement of the obvious. But conversation is a two way street. As defined in the dictionary it is “An informal interchange of thoughts, information, etc., by spoken words; oral communication between persons”

By this standard, most folks don’t converse with God. They simply drop of a shopping list on the way to the mall. All too often even the most earnest of prayers sounds more like a shopping list than a conversation. It doesn’t matter whether we are praying for ourselves or for other people: We go to God with our wants and desires 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’ve got quite a different solution in mind.”

Serious problems arise when conversations with God are like a one-way street. If we don’t take the trouble to listen to God, we tend to 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 infinitely wise – all knowing, in fact. And because of this shopping list prayers tend to be a mere 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 simply to drop off a 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 knows already is a sad waste of time.

When the disciples asked Jesus whom they should pray, they probably expected him to lay down an elaborate ritual, longer than Morning or Evening Prayer services, with all sorts of complicated formulae and obeisances. Instead, he gave them the simplest prayer imaginable: “The Lord’s Prayer.” It must have been a real a downer!

But the Lord’s Prayer says it all: As far as petitions go, really nothing more needs to be added. Indeed, when it comes down to it, intercessory prayer as we practice it in Church is not so much for God’s benefit as our own.

When we make our intercessions, we are informing God of needs that he is already well aware of. The actual value of our intercessions, however, lies in reminding 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.

In this regard, it’s important to remember that the disciples spent three whole years listening to God, and they still got things wrong. Therefore, it’s important always to check out what we think we’ve heard with the inspired word of God: The Bible. That, of course, is the real purpose for Bible study – to make sure we understand the things God has said to us.

But before we dare do that we need to learn to listen, and for that we need the quiet confidence to ask his Holy Spirit to lift us to his presence where, as the ancient collect says, we may “be still and know that he is God.” *AMEN*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.