

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

The Reverend Larry Turner relates the following story about following directions.

“My phone was secure. I had it shoved far down into my pants pocket. There was no way it could fall out; no way could I lose it. I denied it at the time but I saw the signs. They read “Please put any items that you do not want to lose in the bins or lockers before getting on the ride.” I chose to ignore them. They were even periodically making announcements concerning the danger of losing your items. I chose not to listen. The phone was secure, deep in my pocket.

I stood in that line for 90 minutes with my family waiting to get on that ride. I wonder how many times did I see that sign. I wonder how many times I heard that message. But I was enjoying myself, laughing and joking, in anticipation of getting on that ride. I wasn’t worried about my phone. It was secure in my pocket.

Finally, the moment arrived. One more time I saw the sign. One more time I heard the message. One more time my hand felt my phone safe and secure in my pocket. I climb in the seat.

Seat belt on? Check! Strap around me? Check! Seat bar latched in place? Check! Phone secure? Must be because now I can’t move. Slowly the seat glides backwards until you are lying flat looking at the sky. The ride begins moving, slowly up a hill. Suddenly you crest the hill and are violently flipped over and find yourself suspended over a pool of water as you soar like Superman around the track. You soar up and down hills in a crazed frenzy.

But before the ride stopped I knew it was gone. My empty pocket testified to that fact when I exited the ride. Gone were my contacts. Gone were my photos. Gone were my emails. Gone was the ability to contact my wife and tell her of the stupid thing I had done. All gone.”

The readings for today have a common theme running through them and it is about us paying attention and following directions. “Wisdom cries out in the street....give heed to my reproof. I will pour out my thoughts to you....I have called and you refused.” The victim in the story paid the price for not heeding the warnings and many of us have met similar results. I know that I have. It is called hubris: “I know more than the authors of that sign....I know more than God...you don’t need to tell me anything because I know it already”.

Throughout the Bible, the reader is warned to pay attention to the voice of God....and not just hear the voice. James 1:22 – “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says!” And Proverbs 16:20 – “Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.” And Matthew 7:24 – “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” And in today’s Gospel reading, Jesus is teaching Wisdom to his disciples trying to help them understand the road they must walk. For Jesus, it seemed to be an endless task. Time and time again they wanted to do it their way and would not really listen.

Yeah....this rings a bell. Let me give you a personal example about listening to wisdom. First, I'm not equating Dr. Fred Shriver with God or make him more than a Church History professor but he taught me a valuable lesson. Prior to seminary, my study habits were abysmal. Somehow, I missed the course in the Art of Studying 101. Arriving in New York City, I felt that I would be able to navigate through the first semester without requiring help or guidance. That is until my first meeting with Dr. Fred Shriver.

At the initial sit-down, he asked me to write a paper of 8 – 10 pages; the subject matter was up to me. Surprise, surprise...I chose the English Reformation. For the next week, I slaved over it, checking and rechecking. And the day and hour arrived when we met again in his apartment. With fear and trembling, I read the paper and then there was silence. Dr. Shriver coughed and said: "Mr. Darby, it is High Tea time. I am going to have glass of Sherry. Would you like a glass? You are going to need it." My ears were open! Wisdom cried out and I listened!

God speaks to all of us constantly throughout the day but our mind is on other things; important things and ridiculous things. We are continuously distracted by culture's voice; the announcer on TV who is trying to sell us something that will make us look younger or at least feel younger. (Lot's of luck!) When I say that God is speaking to all of us, I meant that globally not just in this church or town or country.

In Phoenix, at Senator McCain's funeral, Grant Woods, his former Chief of Staff, told a story of McCain's imprisonment at what was referred to as the Hanoi Hilton. One of the prison guards had an unusual habit. When his chief officer was not watching, he would loosen the bindings around his wrist. Later, outside the prison cells, he walked up to McCain and with his toe, drew a cross in the sand and then quickly covered it over so his fellow guards would not notice. The Psalmist says: "...yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

And God's voice, the voice of Wisdom will find us; we do not have to seek it, for Wisdom will find us. Anthony Bloom reminds us that we "will find stability at the moment when you discover that God is everywhere, that you do not need to seek Him elsewhere...if you cannot find God here you will not find God anywhere else...This is important because it is only at the moment that you recognize this that you truly find the fullness of the Kingdom of God in all its richness within you; that God is present in every situation and every place, that you will be able to say, "So then I shall stay where I am."

God used Dr. Fred Shriver to find me and guide me on my journey in the Big Apple and beyond. God used a prison guard in Vietnam to give John McCain a moment of respite and hope. Family members and friends and strangers have a way of finding us in the most unlikely places and leaving us a word or a touch or a hug or just a knowing look of recognition that says "I know what you are going through". The onus is on us to be still and read and heed the messages from God.

A prayer authored by Traci Miles: "Lord, thank You for the people You have divinely placed in my life who speak holy truth, love and words of wisdom. Give me a heart of discernment to know when You are using someone to speak instruction into my heart and my circumstances, and give me the strength and courage to follow through with that advice, even when it's hard. Fill me with peace in knowing that even if I take a wrong turn, Your purpose will prevail." AMEN