

Hope Lutheran Church
Dr Jan L. Womer

April 6, 2008
The Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36-41
1 Peter 1:17-23

Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19
Luke 24:13-35

Do you ever sit down to eat only to be interrupted by a telephone call?
Frankly, I have no interest in refinancing a mortgage or having a new roof installed when I am busy enjoying my dinner!

Those little answering machines and voice mail certainly do wonders at making meal times more quiet and pleasant! Of course, there is a down side....you do not know if it is an important call!

Life is like that. We get used to many of the sounds around us and don't pay any attention to them. OR, we turn on the answering machine and then forget to check the messages.

What about our religious faith...our listening to God...our receiving the messages that may be revealed to us? Are we oblivious to the sound and don't hear? Are we so focused on one thing that our tunnel vision keeps us from seeing the messages of God all around us?

God has a problem. God wants to dialogue with us human beings, but too many people have turned on some kind of "spiritual answering machine" and the message never gets through. A good many of us get into our life's track and we plough straight ahead, missing what is happening around us.

God has been trying to get the attention of human beings since creation and His call goes unanswered or is swallowed up in that little answering machine that hears it but no one really listens to it.

Adam and Eve were having a great walk in the garden that day when God started calling: "*Where are you? Yoo-hoo, anybody listening, anybody home?*" They didn't want to talk to God at that point so they went and tried to hide.

Isn't that ancient story a remarkable example of how human beings still respond to God?

Hello...God calling?...You must have a wrong number, you couldn't want me....

OR we get so busy and preoccupied with our personal life and needs that we miss God's call completely.

One of my childhood heroes was Albert Schweitzer. He completed degrees in theology at Universities in Strasbourg, Berlin and Paris. He became pastor at Strasbourg and began writing a series of very scholarly studies on the New Testament, especially on Jesus' teachings and on St. Paul. While he was doing that he was also an accomplished recital organist and an expert on the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. Then, to fill in the rest of his time, he completed his degree in medicine and became a physician.

Here was a man with three successful careers. He was well-respected in each of them. If anyone had reason to be too busy to look for other ways in which God might use him, it was this young man of 37. At age 38 he went to the small village of Lambarene, French Equatorial Africa, and spent the next 52 years of his life there as the village doctor.

God got Schweitzer's attention - and his life of fame and influence also became a life of complete dedication and service to the people he loved.



Today's reading from Luke's Gospel is a wonderful reminder of how our human lives and needs can be drawn into the presence of God's peace and power that lifts us above the present.

Cleopas and the unknown disciple of Jesus were walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were hurting inside. Their Teacher and friend had died on a cross and they mourned his death. They wondered what would come of all the things he had said and taught. Would they all be forgotten and never be put into practice?

The stranger came up to them and walked with them. They poured out their sorrow to him. *Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?*

Luke describes the situation in a powerful way: *their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*

I wonder how many times in life my eyes were not able to recognize God with me and God at work around me. How many times were my ears closed to God's calling to me? What about you? Our problem is that we can become complacent and turn on the answering machine so that God doesn't get through to us anymore.

When someone falls into that trap they often do the same with those closest to them - spouses, significant others, children, parents. We get so focused on our one track that we miss the joy of sharing our life with God and with those we love. We do not hear their voices calling to us in love, pleading for our attention.

Time and again you will meet people who got into that rut but believed that everything and everyone in their life was as happy as they were. When a spouse suddenly packs up and moves out, they are appalled. *I thought everything was great....how did this happen?*

I have a friend who is the son of a pastor. One day he said to me: *My father loves his flock and does everything for them; I wish I knew he loves my mother and myself that same way.*

When God seeks our attention, it isn't only to tell us to change careers or to go off to some exotic place. Sometimes that does happen! But more often, God is trying to get our attention so that we can begin once again to focus on those precious to us. God wants us to love Him; he also wants us to take the responsibility for building loving and caring relationships with others.

It does no good to put it off...*Oh, I'll spend more time with my spouse or my children or my parents in just a couple of months when all this present pressure is off.*

A couple of months may be too late. A relationship may be too far gone to rebuild; the person with whom we want to rebuild may be gone too.

Mickey Rooney...you know, the child actor about a hundred years ago... was interviewed on TV and they talked about his ninth marriage. His first two wives had died young. Then he had a series of marriages that failed. At the time of the interview he had been married to his present wife for 20 years. *What changed?* the interviewer asked.

What changed? Rooney responded. *I gave my life to Christ. That changed everything. I had lived my life in chaos. I was a millionaire when I was a child. I participated in every form of lust and human degradation. Then, twenty years ago, I gave my life to Christ, warts, bruises and all. That made all the difference.*

When Jesus came from the tomb on Easter Day, he stood beside Mary who sat and cried. *They have taken my Lord away," she cried, "and I don't know where they have put him.*

Mary! Jesus replied. She was called by name. This stranger called her by name! He got her to change the focus of her thoughts away from a dead body she thought had been stolen...to look at a resurrected face and body that took away the tears and brought her joy and new purpose.

As Jesus shared bread with the two disciples in Emmaus, Luke tells us: *their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*

They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

Jesus wants your attention too. He calls your name. *"Let me bring a new outlook and a new hope into your life"* he promises.

Lay aside the cares and the soul-consuming activities that are weakening your body and spirit, that are straining the depth of your relationship with those you love.

If a great block of ice fell from the sky today and knocked you unconscious for three weeks....you know, those tasks that weigh so heavily on you right now would just have to wait - and your world would not come to an end.

Saul got hit with a bright light that knocked him to the ground and all the old stuff that he lived for suddenly became unimportant and a new and exciting life unfolded ahead of him.

We don't have to wait for the bright light, or the block of ice to get our attention!

- when you start reading the Scriptures, you will find your Lord speaking to you; the bread and wine that enters your mouth is Jesus' gift – *given for you!*

- when you take time to sit quietly and think and talk to God as you would sit on a park bench and talk with your closest friend, you will begin to discover a new inner peace;

- when you take time to focus anew on the great gift God has given you in the people who love you, you will find absolute joy.

Unplug your spiritual answering machine and pick up the receiver...God wants to have have a conversation with you!