

Column

Have you been there? Yesterday, I was on the telephone for over an hour – mostly waiting -- attempting to deal with a matter that should have taken five minutes.

In this case, I called to report a telephone outage for a person who lives far away from town where there is no cellular service. More than that, she has chronic health problems. Thus, for this person not having a working landline is a life and death matter.

In my quest to help, I was shuttled between no less than seven AT&T representatives located all across the country. One said it looked as if the person's payment had not been received, but he was not at liberty to tell me the bill amount since I did not have the last four digits of her social security number.

Because a health and safety issue was involved, I put some money on the account using my personal credit card. The agent assured me that service would be restored within 30 minutes. It was not. So, I made additional calls, all futile.

Needless to say, this experience was frustrating, but unfortunately not uncommon in today's world. Technology *should* make life easier, but sadly many corporations use it in ways which does the exact opposite . . . all of which remind me of the words of an old Gospel song entitled "The Royal Telephone".

Written in 1919 when telephones were just becoming a part of the American home scene, the song begins with the words: "Central's never 'busy,' always on the line; You may hear from heaven almost any time."

A stanza or so down, Frederick M. Lehman, the author of the lyrics, further develops this thought when he says: "There will be no waiting on this royal line, Telephone to glory always answers just in time." Imagine service without repetitious ads and canned music!

We may smile at Lehman's words today. They may even seem corny and trite. Yet, there is great truth in them. Prayer is a great privilege and gift. In the Gospels, Jesus both commanded and modelled it. Sadly, we often fail to take advantage of this gift. Instead, we grumble, fret and attempt to deal with life's problems under our own steam.

As we begin 2021, maybe one of our resolutions ought to be to pray more and worry less. The inspirational writer Max Lucado gives us an additional

insight when he says: “You are never more like Jesus than when you pray for others.”

Who is on your mind and heart at this time? Go ahead and pick up the Royal Telephone. Central’s on the line. No waiting! This isn’t, thank goodness, today’s AT&T.

Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve: Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.