

## Column

I was taught, as I am sure you were, that listening in on someone else's conversation is rude. There are, however, exceptions. I am thinking, in particular, of conversations relating to the Gospel of Christ and the encouragement that comes from it.

If you were the one having such a conversation and looked around and noticed one or more people eavesdropping, I don't think you would mind one bit. You would view it as God at work.

Something on this order once happened to me while travelling by rail from London to Cambridge in England. The man seated across from me was also from Blue Ridge and was a diligent and thoughtful student of the scriptures. Shortly after our train pulled out of Kings Cross station we began discussing the hope that comes from knowing the crucified and risen Christ. The discussion continued all the way until we arrived at our destination. So intent were we on it that we hardly knew when our train had pulled into the station. The journey from London to Cambridge is a little over an hour.

After debarking, another member of our group remarked that several people seated around us had been listening with great interest to our conversation. Was I offended? Absolutely not! Hopefully, good seed had been planted that would take root and sprout.

More recently I was on the receiving end of "overhearing the Gospel." Following a Sunday morning service and after a potluck lunch in our downstairs hall, I caught myself listening to a church member tell the bishop (who was present that Sunday) about how she dealt with the death of her husband.

She said she had been very despondent after he died suddenly but had struck upon an exercise which she found very helpful. Instead of focusing on her loss, she set about in a very intentional manner to list her blessings and to give thanks for them. When she did, she was surprised

to find how her list continued to expand. Her pain and loss did not go away, but she found a peace and joy which comes only from knowing the Lord of Life and the One who holds all souls – the living and dead – in His safekeeping. I am sure the bishop was encouraged, as was I who was an eavesdropper into this conversation.

God is not limited in the ways He uses to bring His message to those in need. In Philippians 1:27, Paul writes: “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.” “Conversation” as used here means more than the words that come out of one’s mouth. Rather, it encompasses one’s whole manner of life. But it does not mean less. Words count. They minister grace or hurt. They can be both a vehicle for the Gospel or a deterrent.

Rude or not people are constantly overhearing what we say? What are they hearing in our public and private conversations (including what we post on social media)? Are there any words of comfort, hope and encouragement? Is the Gospel of Christ present? If not, what are you going to do about it? What am I?

*LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer)*

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