

“Can you hear me?”
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Dear Friends,

The theme of this Local Arrangement service is “Can you hear me?” In it we reflect on how God speaks to us; how we speak to one another, and on deafness, both spiritual and physical.

Please feel free to 'customize' your service to your own congregation... e.g.... If there is someone in your congregation willing to talk about how hearing impairment impacts on their lives and what can make things easier, you could include this instead of the quotation from 'Social Work Today' on page 3. (You may need to provide paper for people to jot down ideas...page 4.)The hymns are only suggestions - if your congregation knows others that fit in with the theme, especially any newer ones, you could use those. This is *your congregation's* service of worship to God. The prayers of intercession will need to be prepared in line with current concerns.

Chris Odell (Sheasby)

“Can you hear me?”

Call to Worship: Leader 1

Come, let us praise the Lord! Let us sing for joy to God, who protects us!
Let us come before him with thanksgiving and sing joyful songs of praise. *(from Psalm 95)*

HYMN – O for a thousand tongues to sing....*StF 364; H&P 744; MP 496.*

Prayer of Adoration: Leader 2 In our prayer of adoration there is a response –
With our lips and our lives: **we sing your praises.**

Let us pray:

Creator God,

You spoke and our world came into being.

At its birth the morning stars sang together in joy.

You breathed life into man and woman, you breathe life into us.

And, when we refused to listen to your words to us

You sent your prophets and messengers

To remind us of your message of love and justice.

With our lips and our lives: **we sing your praises.**

Word of God,

You came to live alongside us, to share the trials and joys of human life

And speak to us in a language we could understand

Of the Love at the heart of the universe;

To show us, by word and deed, Love's compassion and forgiveness,

To heal our deafness to God and one another.

With our lips and our lives: **we sing your praises.**

Spirit of God,

You rested as fiery tongues of flame on the heads of the first apostles

Enabling them to tell the Good News of Jesus in language all could understand.

You continue to speak through your church, through us.

You continue to breathe words of hope and encouragement,

Of Love, joy and forgiveness, to all who will listen.

With our lips and our lives: **we sing your praises.**

In the blessed Name of Jesus, **Amen.**

Introduction to the theme of the service: Leader 1

The theme for our service is “‘Can you hear me?’ asks God”. Statistics tell us that one in ten of those aged 40 – 69 has age related hearing loss. Impaired hearing is a life-altering problem for many of us. It is the ‘unseen disability’ that others find it hard to understand. In our service we’re thinking about hearing and listening. God challenges each one of us with the question ‘Can you hear me?’ The kind of hearing and listening he requires of us is not dependent on our physical ability to hear, but on the opening of our hearts and minds to God’s message of love for all.

Old Testament Reading: Reader 1 ‘Can you hear me?’ God calls to Samuel in I Samuel 3:1-10

Comment: Leader 1

That story about the infant Samuel was often told in Sunday school as a story of how God speaks not only to adults but also to children. It makes the point that God has a message for each one of us – even if we don't immediately recognise his calling voice. God's Spirit flows freely through our world, and it is through our openness to God's voice in unexpected places and our dedication to prayer that we can tune into God's message for us.

Prayer: Leader 2 Let us pray -

Loving God, we admit to you in sadness that
so often the things you say to us take us by surprise, find us unprepared.
We expect to hear you in church, blessing our offering of money,
we do not expect to find you begging from us on the streets.
We expect to hear you in the Bible readings or sermon,
we do not expect to hear you speaking through our television screen
in reports of hunger, warfare or persecution
We expect to hear you as we experience the emotion of prayer and praise,
we do not expect to hear you in the dull complaints of everyday living.

SILENCE

Word of God,
we confess that we do not always hear, or want to hear,
All you have to say to us. Open our ears to your call, Lord.
Tune us in to what you are saying to us. Forgive the deafness of our souls.
In the name of Jesus, who brought us the message of forgiveness and healing, **Amen.**

Offering and Offering Prayer: Leader 2

God of never-ending love,
take this money and use it,
take our lives and use us,
for we have heard your call. **Amen.**

HYMN: Master, speak! Thy servant heareth... *StF 666; H&P 535; MP 459.*

Comment: Leader 1

'Can you hear me through the words of Jesus?' asks God. Our next two readings, from the gospels, are about hearing and listening to his message, and Jesus opening the ears of the deaf. In the first reading, the disciples wonder why, although the people hear Jesus's stories, they do not take in his teaching or recognise him. Jesus points out that there is a difference between hearing and listening. When we truly listen, what we hear can become part of our understanding of life. In fact, though it doesn't say so here, stories are a very good way to convey truths, because they are often easier to listen to and think about than sermons! In the second reading, Jesus performs a miracle, which shows what living life in all its fullness in the kingdom of God will be like. A man cut off from society, unable to communicate with others, is healed of his deafness and enabled to speak. 'Open up!' says Jesus to him, as he says to us in our selective hearing of God's message!

New Testament Reading 1: Reader 2 Matthew 13:10, 13 -16

New Testament Reading 2: Reader 3 Mark 7: 31 - 37

Reflection: Reader 4

I felt really afraid. My friends looked very excited and were jabbering away like quarrelling sparrows but I, of course, had no idea what they were saying. As usual, it seemed, they were making a decision for me about something I had no idea about and certainly no say! They grabbed me by the arms and took me through the village to where a man with kind eyes was

talking to a crowd of people – about what, I couldn't tell you. They went to speak to him, Jesus, and he looked beyond them to where I stood, bewildered, and he smiled at me. He came over, took me gently by the hand and led me to where we could be alone, a place of quiet and calm. Then he did some strange things. He put his fingers in my ears, spat, and touched my tongue. He looked up to heaven, in a really intense way – and must have made some kind of sound. Then he said to me – and I heard it! – 'Open up!'. And my ears were opened, and my mouth was opened, and my whole life in this world was opened up before me.

It was all rather mysterious and difficult to understand. I knew for certain that God was working through Jesus, but I realise that others might have had different ideas. I think that's why he told the people there not to talk about what had happened. But did they listen? No! There's more than one way of being deaf!

HYMN: Make way, make way for Christ the King... *StF 264; MP 457 OR*
Go, tell it on the mountain.... *H&P 135; MP 179.*

New Testament Reading 3: *Reader 1* Romans 10:10-17

Comment: *Leader 1*

'Can you hear me through the words of other people?' 'Can other people hear me through *your* words?' asks God. There are two skills that Christians need to learn and use, to answer 'Yes' to God's question. The first is the skill of being a good listener, of being able to focus in a spirit of love, understanding and respect on what others tell us. Then we will hear the voice of God in that conversation and not only our own voice. The second is the skill of good talking – guided by that same spirit of love, understanding and respect. As Christians we have a message to share, but we don't want that message to be distorted or misunderstood. We can practise these skills on one another!

HYMN: Go forth and tell...*H&P 770: MP 178 OR*
We have a gospel to proclaim.... *StF 418; H&P 465; MP 728*

To think about: *Reader 2* From 'Social Work Today'

A day in the life of a hearing-impaired older adult may include struggles with the following: hearing alarms or telephones & understanding someone while talking on the phone; understanding when several people are talking; understanding when a speaker's face is unseen; understanding speech on TV; understanding whispering; understanding people in a large room; understanding unclear or accented speech; being unaware someone is talking; understanding in public places; ordering food; or enjoying "sweet nothings" in a romantic situation.

Individuals with normal hearing often assume that simply saying something louder or turning up the volume will enable a hard-of-hearing elder to hear. Volume is not necessarily the issue; difficulties with sound and word discrimination may be involved. The need to repeat or receiving strange responses to what is said adds to negative perceptions of older adults with hearing loss as being slow. The resultant negative self-view adds to the emotional pain of hearing loss.

A sense of belonging is important to mental health, yet individuals who are hard of hearing don't belong entirely in the hearing world or in the deaf culture.

Older adults who are hard of hearing often report that their hearing loss causes communication problems, and can result in difficulty thinking or concentrating. This results in inattentiveness, distraction, and boredom. The most serious consequence is withdrawal or failing to participate -"I can't participate, so I might as well pack it in. I can't contribute, so what good am I?"

Comment & Challenge: *Leader 1*

If you, or someone you are close to, are experiencing any kind of hearing loss, that article will not be telling you anything you do not know already. Hearing loss is a big problem for many in our society – and for many in our congregations. It will be difficult for those with hearing loss to answer those last two questions - 'Can you hear God through the words of other people?' 'Can other people hear God through your words?' if they are no longer able to participate in (Page 3)

conversations or hear much in worship or fellowship groups. We are challenged to be more sensitive to the needs of those who are hard of hearing. What can we do, as individuals and as a church, to improve their experience of life?

Before our prayers of intercession, we will have a quiet time to think about this challenge. A time to chat to those around you, to pray in silence, to jot down any ideas you have to share with your church stewards.....

TIME OF QUIET

Prayers of Intercession: Leader 2

Response – Lord, Lord, speak to us: **and help us to respond to your words.**

Let us pray:

God of salvation,

when we pray to you for the knowledge of forgiveness for those burdened by guilt and sin;

when we pray to you for healing and comfort for those who are suffering or sorrowful,

when we pray to you for help, patience and understanding for those with hearing loss,

hear our prayers;

and help us to listen to what we ask for,

that our prayers might challenge and change us, too.

Lord, Lord, speak to us: **and help us to respond to your words.**

God of justice,

when we pray to you for justice for the oppressed and exploited of our world;

when we pray to you for food and shelter for the hungry and the homeless,

When we pray to you for peace and security for war-torn communities

hear our prayers;

and help us to listen to what we ask for,

that our prayers might challenge and change us, too.

Lord, Lord, speak to us: **and help us to respond to your words.**

God of love,

when we pray to you for love and understanding between creeds, races and nations,

when we pray to you for one another in our need for guidance and strength,

hear our prayers;

and help us to listen to what we ask for,

that our prayers might challenge and change us, too.

L: Lord, Lord, speak to us:

R: and help us to respond to your words.

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,

The Message of salvation for all humankind. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

HYMN: I, the Lord of sea and sky... *StF 663: MP 857 OR*

Behold the servant of the Lord!... *H&P 788*

Blessing: Leader 1

We have heard of the love of God for each one of us.

We have heard of the new life offered to us in the Word, Jesus Christ.

We have heard the challenge to share that Good News with others.

Now let us go out in joy to share God's message with those we meet.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, go with us. **Amen.**