

Peace and Quiet

There was once a man who lived in a big, grey house and who hated the noise children made as they ran by the house laughing and shouting. He prayed, 'Lord, spare me from the noise of children.' And the Lord heard his prayer. But then the 'phone would ring and friends would ask how he was and whether he would like to go out with them. He would answer, 'I'm getting on fine - by myself.' After so many calls he grew tired and so prayed, 'Lord, spare me from the 'phone calls of friends.' And the Lord heard his prayer.

Things felt a lot calmer and quieter after that. But, then, on the television he saw programmes telling of the war, hatred and unhappiness in the world, and so he prayed, 'Lord, spare me from other people's troubles and worries.' And the Lord heard his prayer. Soon life became very calm and very quiet.

Because it was so calm and quiet he began to notice the twittering of sparrows in the trees nearby, and it disturbed his peace. He prayed, 'Lord, spare me from the twittering of birds (and the barking of dogs and the meowing of cats while we're at it).' And the Lord answered his prayer. And life, after that, became very, very calm and very, very quiet.

Every so often, though, an aeroplane roared overhead and cars passed by,

revving their engines. In the great peace of his life such noises disturbed and annoyed him all the more. He prayed, 'Lord, spare from the noise of aeroplanes and cars (and of trains and prams and squeaky shopping trolleys and ANY OTHER NOISE! Please).' And the Lord heard his prayer. After that, life was very, very, very peaceful and quiet.

Because he was so happy he decided to take a short walk around his house. When he opened the front door he did not see the familiar street and houses, instead he saw that he was on a small sandy beach of a little island in the middle of an enormous sea. Nothing moved except the sun. The waters stilled gently onto the beach. The man spent a few days in the greatest peace he'd ever known.

But then he grew sad. Day after day he grew sadder and sadder, not knowing why he felt so unhappy. He saw a tiny speck on the horizon, a seagull flying. He jumped for joy and this scared the bird away. Dolphins swam and leapt from the water before his eyes, but they soon moved on. And night fell for what felt like the thousandth time. He thought to himself, I am so lonely and unhappy.

He breathed in, held his arms up to the stars and cried a prayer to the Lord. He prayed, '...

What was the prayer of the man?