**Homily for 1/19/2025 Psalm 36:5-10 “Did You Check to Make Sure It Was Plugged In?”**

*Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the clouds.*

*Your righteousness is like the strong mountains, your justice like the great deep; you save both man and beast, O Lord. How priceless is your love, O God! Your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings. They feast upon the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the well of life, and in your light, we see light. Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you, and your favor to those who are true of heart.*

Just down the street there sits a lovely parsonage owned by the Trinity United Methodist Church. It has lots of space and even a basement, and in that basement are the usual laundry machines, one each for washing and drying. And inside the lift-up lid of the sturdy, vintage washing machine is a troubleshooting guide, and I swear that this actually appears in print*: If your machine fails to operate, did you check to make sure it was plugged in?*

So sensible, so straightforward, so seemingly needless to say, but you know how us humans can be kinda scatterbrained sometimes…covering their bases, they were. *Did you check to make sure it was plugged in?* It is not often that I turn to household appliances for spiritual guidance, but seriously, it doesn’t get any more basic than this. We believe God is the Source, capital S, the motive energy of the cosmos. We also believe that God is always and everywhere available, analogous to the electrical power that waits behind every wall outlet in our buildings, ready and waiting for our involvement. Ready and waiting, as it were, for us to connect, for us to plug in. And so, the practical Maytag advice becomes useful spiritual inquiry: if your life is failing to operate, if you feel your energy waning and your light dimming, might be worth it to check if you are plugged in to the essential energetic uplift of God?

The Psalm we have just heard speaks incandescently about the plugged-in life. First, he extols the Source: *Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the clouds.**Your righteousness is like the strong mountains, your justice like the great deep.* He then describes what the plugged-in life looks like: *Your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings. They feast upon the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the well of life, and in your light, we see light.* Doesn’t that sound great? And then, almost as an afterthought, he casually alludes to the possibility that not everybody is as excited about God as he is: *Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you, and your favor to those who are true of heart… “*those who know you” and “true of heart” are his poetic descriptions of our plain-jane idea today, cause he’s talking about people who are plugged-in.

I feel the need to expand this a little bit before we take the deeper dive, and accept that there are *ways* to be plugged in but still not functioning. We can have a faith; maybe we’ve had it all our lives, but things, well, the lights are on but it may feel like nobody’s home. I think the image of our common light switches is useful to us here…basically just two kinds, and both of them give you somewhat remote operation of your lamp without needing to plug into the wall socket every single time. The little twisty knob, the little spinny wheel, the basic toggle switch, all of these interrupt the flow of power from the source to its destination. Restore the power, flip the switch, and the light comes on! Which is to say that we *can be* spiritually plugged in but there can still be impediments, our switches can be in the ‘off’ position, even though things look just great over at the wall socket. And my favorite relatively new switch is the foot switch, like we use for big lamps and Christmas tree lights and such. This eliminates bending and connecting plugs and other strenuous activities. More on that one later…

So…there are so many kinds of folks in the world; I just got off of a cruise ship yesterday with roughly six thousand of our brothers and sisters. Serving on the staff alone, sixty countries were represented. People are gloriously different, but that doesn’t always work to our advantage. The Psalmist was writing to the faithful Hebrews, who were at that time pretty homogenous. It might never have actually occurred to him that the world could be filled with people who were not plugged into God in any conscious way, but we know that to be true. In the last week I experienced what many of you have also observed, that the God of the stomach and the God of the bar stool and the God of being first in line are powerful deities in this world. If we are waiting for the disconnected ones among us to light up, to show forth the radiance of relatedness to things other than their pet obsessions, we are likely waiting in vain. Of course it is our blessed task to model for others what the plugged-in life looks like, but so many *are* plugged-in, plugged-in to their gambling and their fixation with buffets and their endless drinking and distractions, they are hard wired into these things, but not plugged in to God. And these worldly things, as fun and rejuvenating as they can be, cannot save. Cannot redeem. We can fill our bellies with food, but that food cannot fill our souls with peace and good will. We can be wired into endless sources of amusement, but only one source of salvation.

It wasn’t an all-pagan-all-the-time cruise; there were, of course, a huge number of Christian folks on that big boat, just as there are in the world at large, Christian folks who by all appearances are plugged in, yet there is no glow, no internal luminescence to their faith. This brings us to that middle ground of Christianity, where we may find ourselves, too, having the form of faith but not its power. We have to activate those switches, right? God is ready, able, waiting, but we bring impediments, what the traditional church called besetting sins, actions and choices that derail us, that throw us off the path, that flip our spiritual switches to the off position. We look back and see ourselves still plugged in to God; we come to church pretty often, we pray sometimes, when we remember or when we are in distress; we help folks in need and enjoy that surge of satisfaction that comes from those choices, but we cannot sustain ourselves on that weak trickle of spiritual power. We need to open the line between us and God.

Two more nutty images, but I have been there, and you probably have too. What about the faith that we might call ‘foot-switch’ Christianity? We want the power, right, but only when we are sitting in darkness, and that power must be delivered to us with a minimum of effort. God forbid we bend or stretch or inconvenience ourselves in any way. And as bad as ‘foot-switch’ Christianity sounds, there is an even more absurd version. Do you remember the Clapper? Clap on, clap off, clap on, clap off… the Clapper? Sound activated lamp control from the comfort of our couches! It makes for a relaxing night at home, but what a horrible way to relate to God, and yet some people do. Summon God, dismiss God, as if the Creator of the Cosmos was a genie in a bottle awaiting our whims and commands. I tell ya, if there is a way to mis-manage relationships, we humans are gonna find that way.

And yet…we invariably return to our usual truth about the eternal availability of God, flowing into us in waves grace, pulses of pardon, joyful and illuminating and restorative. To have that kind of connection with God we need both to be plugged in *and* to have our switches in the receiving mode. Getting plugged in is, in many ways, the easier part, and we know how to do that. We do that by deliberate time spent in the ways and the words of God: communal worship, personal contemplation, reading Scripture and other uplifting texts; acts of mercy and kindness and self-sacrifice on behalf of those who cannot pay their light bills and whose switches are fouled with the crud of neglect. But being plugged in is the simple part; being receptive, choosing receptivity, that’s tougher. We want to be our own Source, our own power plant, we want to do it on our own, but it never really works. Unlike God, we do *not* have endless reserves of energy and patience and compassion and forgiveness, and we celebrate and try to emulate those who apparently do, folks like Mother Theresa and Jimmy Carter and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. Somehow, we forget that their love and justice and healing flowed into the world from a much deeper source, not from just themselves. And honestly, friends, the biggest difference between a man marching for justice and a man building homes for others into his late nineties and a woman serving the poor relentlessly for decades, the biggest difference between them and us isn’t really that big. We are all plugged in, but we aren’t all switched on. And so long as our bottle or our buffet line or our sex drive or our lust for stuff are where our energies get diverted, we will never glow. We will never be, dare I say, illuminated. In this season of Epiphany, this celebration of light, this accepting of our call to be light for others, we need to check if we are plugged in, sure. But more than that, we need to surrender the controlling habit of keeping God at bay. Brothers and sisters, our switches need flipping. Amen.