

# “Plugged In”

## John 12:20-33

### March 29, 2009

We live in a time when conservation has become an incredibly important concept and way of life. Everything from ‘Daylight Savings Time’, fuel efficient hybrid cars and reusable shopping bags are all designed and promoted to save energy. Hopefully we are catching on and are willing to make the sacrifices needed to save on our natural resources. Of course, some people have been conscious of the need to conserve for along time. Many of you will remember Gracie Allen, who played the scatterbrained wife in a comedy team with her husband George Burns? Once, Gracie called in a repairman to fix her electric clock. The repairman fiddled with it for a while and then said, "There's nothing wrong with the clock; you didn't have it plugged in." Gracie replied, "Of Course I didn't have it plugged in. I don't want to waste electricity, so I only plug it in when I want to know what time it is."

Well, it does seem like pretty good logic. If you are not going to be using the gadget for some time, don't keep it plugged in. The commercial reminds us that the cell phone charger continues to use electricity whenever it is plugged in - even after you are done charging your phone. It is good to conserve. But we are all too aware of the fact that some things just do not function the way they are intended to function if they are unplugged from the source of power. Sometimes there are no short cuts or cost savings. Sometimes you just have to be plugged in.

Today's Gospel text comes immediately after the triumphal enter of Jesus into Jerusalem. Everyone is excited about Jesus at the time. People have come out in mass in order to welcome Jesus with Palm branches waving and cloths thrown down on the roadway. The text tells us that there were even some Greeks who saw what was going on and wanted to have a face to face meeting with Jesus. When the disciples made the request to Jesus He gives what would seem to be a rather bazar response about a grain of wheat being planted in the ground. On the surface it is hard to understand where the comment is coming from. Certainly, as we have read it over the years with an understanding of the death and resurrection of Christ, we can see where the image can remind us of the death and resurrection of Christ. We can think of this image as a reminder of the fact that God is able to bring new life even to those who have died and have been buried in the ground. But it seems to me that it can also been understood as a call to total commitment if the hope is that we will one day experience that new life and growth that God intends us to know - a new life that is not just for eternity but also for today. We can not imagine that coming to Jesus just when the crowds are all cheering is what is needed. We can not imagine that we will know the right time if we just plug in our electric clock when we want to know the time. Life in Christ calls us to be ‘buried’ in it - the dirt piled up, both sunshine and rain - long cold night and blazing sun filled days. And there, thru the mysterious power of God, new life springs up to produce that which we long for.

This week I was reading about seeds. The article spoke of things that I had read

before. It spoke of the fact that tiny seeds can transform the landscape around our home from bare ground to beautiful flower beds. From the stand point of Botany, we know quite a bit about seeds and how they germinate. We know that a seed consists of a protective seed coat, some kind of storage tissue with nutrient reserves, and a dormant plant embryo. We know that under the correct conditions the dormant embryo can be "awakened" to germinate and grow into a mature plant. Some Botanists say that in every seed there is an on/off switch that will let the seed grow. I am far from being a Botanist - so I really don't understand the whole thing. But some things I do know. I know that the switch will not be turned on and the seed begin to grow if you just leave the seed in the packet it comes in when you buy it down at the store. And I am pretty sure that you can not expect go out one morning and look at you flower bed, thinking that you need flowers there and throw in the seeds with the expectation that then you will see the flowers blooming. It takes being buried in the dirt with water and sun falling upon that place where you are buried. It takes becoming rooted and growing through the miraculous power of God at work. Then one day there will be flowers or fruit or seeds. You can not plug in the electric clock when you want to time and still expect it to be right.

In the book "The Message", author Eugene Peterson interprets Jesus' words this way: "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is, destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal." 'Dead to the world' ..... we don't like it. We don't want to lie around in the dirt - we don't want to hang out there through the storms that rage and we don't want to stayed buried when the sun shines ..... so we unplug, walk away from the dirt, climb back into the seed packet .... and we are surprised when the flowers are not blooming when we need them.

In the early 50's the church experienced an unbelievable boom. Through the war years many had experienced 'fox hole conversions' and the trauma of war fears. In response, churches were full and new churches were springing up everywhere. But life came back to 'normal' and church began to experience decline. It was as though people believed that continuing to be rooted in the good soil of God's kingdom was no longer necessary - they could just bloom on their own. Today we continue to see this drawing away from the church. There continues to be an understand that we need the word of God and when needed they still want to turn to the church. But it really doesn't work to plug in the clock when you want to know the time. The true time only comes when you are constantly plugged in - fallen into the dirt - buried - rooted, nourished daily.

One day, when the ancient rabbi Ben Jochai was teaching his students about the miracle of the manna in the wilderness, one of his students asked him why God did not furnish enough manna for Israel at one time to last the entire year. The rabbi answered him with this parable: Once there was a rich man who had a son to whom he promised an annual allowance. Every year on the same day, he would give his son the entire amount. After a while, it happened that the only time the father saw his son was on the day of the year when he was to receive his allowance. So the father changed his plan and gave the son only enough for the day. Then the next day, the son had to return to receive the next day's allowance. From then on, the father saw his son every day. As hard as it may be to grasp, God apparently wants to see us daily.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies ....” A hard call ..... but one that Jesus was willing to follow for us that we might have eternal life. AMEN