

“Snort, Pop, Whoosh, Whoosh, Whoosh”

Psalm 86:1-10

Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.

Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.

You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.

Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
listen to my cry of supplication.

In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.

There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.

All the nations you have made
shall come and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.

For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.

Snort, Pop, Whoosh, Whoosh, Whoosh

Psalm 86:1-10

June 25, 2023

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I.

We begin this morning with the story of a North Country adventure: a trip to the St. Lawrence Power and Equipment Museum located on Rt. 345 just SE of Madrid center. Though I've lived here Canton for many years, and driven by the museum countless times, I have never availed myself of the opportunity to tour the many exhibits, buildings and vast array of equipment of every ilk.

A few weeks ago, I received a call from Lora Gibson of the Swedish Tea-Ring fame; a *sinfully* delicious dessert which Lora gifts to me each year at Christmas. Needless to say, Lora is greatly familiar with the adage, "the way to a minister's heart is through his/her stomach"; or, in this case, through the minister's sweet tooth. Lora called to invite Linda and me to join her and husband Dave for a private tour of the museum in which they have been greatly involved the past few years as volunteers. Dave mows the museum's 30 acres each week, and can be otherwise found working on old engines, cars and tractors.

II.

Big as I am (in part due to Lora) one of the challenging realities of being the minister of a growing and engaging church is that there is increasingly less and less of me to go around. The past few years, hardly a day goes by without having to opt for something I absolutely *have* to do over that which I would very much *like* to do.

Thankfully, everyone once in a while I wake up with enough sense to smell the roses. Though I had countless other obligations, Linda and I were delighted meet Dave and Lora at their home this past Monday to drive over to Madrid to share a delicious picnic lunch Lora had prepared, and tour the museum; all of which took us about four hours. Which, given all of the things there are to do and see at the museum, was barely enough time. From settler's cabin to carriages, farm equipment to fiber arts, the museum is a wonderfully eclectic collection of what life was once like in this neck of the woods.

III.

Though I found the two horse-drawn funeral carriages fascinating, appreciated seeing the contents of Herbie Haven's Shoe Repair Shop which, for years, occupied the basement under what is now Little Italy, and was humbled to discover just how hard life was for those living in this county in its earliest years, there was one particular item (of which there were many examples) which really drew my interest: the so called "[Hit and Miss Engine.](#)" (Click on link to see a video of one in operation.)



Produced by various companies from the 1890s through the 1940s, the name comes from the speed control used on these engines: they fire ("hit") only when operating at or below a set speed, and cycle without firing ("miss") when they exceed their set speed. This is as compared to the "throttle governed" method of speed control. The sound made by the engine is a distinctive "Snort POP whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh snort POP" as the engine fires and then coasts until the speed decreases and it fires again to maintain its set speed.

IV.

Having never heard of such a thing in my life, I was fascinated by the concept and, after we returned home, did a little research. The "Hit and Miss Engine" is a type of "flywheel engine" which, as the name connotes, has a large flywheel or set of flywheels connected to the crankshaft. The flywheels maintain engine speed during engine cycles that do not produce driving

mechanical forces. The flywheels store energy on the combustion stroke and supply stored energy to the mechanical load on the other three strokes of the piston.

While “Hit and Miss Engines” were made in a variety of shapes and sizes, the most common had only one cylinder, were suitcase-sized and mounted on either a wheeled chassis or a wooden sled with handles for ease of mobility as this one engine was used to power a variety of, then, modern conveniences driven by belt or shaft; chief among them the automatic clothes washer (several of the “Hit and Miss Engines” at the museum were made by Maytag).

V.

Later, as homes became electrified, individual appliances each came to have their own electric motor. For a certain generation, though, a family was fortunate to possess just one source of power which they used for a variety of applications: the “Hit and Miss Engine.”

It is at this point that most of you are saying, “I am missing whatever it is you are hoping to hit on, Mike; what does any of this have to do with Gladdening the Soul?” Our outing this week with Lora and Dave helped me to realize that all too often we get locked into understanding the world, and our own lives, in only certain ways; typically, those with which we are most familiar. Every once in a while, however, we stumble upon different ways of seeing, being, and living; either through fathoming a new future, discovering that which already exists unseen, or learning lessons by delving into the past.

VI.

Today’s scripture reading from verses 1-10 of Psalm 86 is, for us, such an opportunity to understand our faith in a new way which, really, is an old way. A psalm of individual lament by way of literary genre, Psalm 86 is commonly, and not incorrectly, understood as a prayer one may offer to God which expresses the pain of one’s present condition and seeks relief from God. In other words, Psalm 86 is one which may be termed a “fox hole” prayer. While such prayers certainly have their uses, I would like to suggest that what should interest us more is how this psalm, coupled with the lessons drawn from the “Hit and Miss Engine,” might best equip us well before we foxes ever find ourselves in such a troublesome hole.

VII.

It strikes me that over the past half century more and more of life is being defined by doo-dads, gizmos and thingamajigs. That is, an ever-widening array of technology driven inventions which have created a highly specialized and task-specific world. By way of example let us take a minute to examine what constitutes the modern kitchen.

We now brew coffee by the cup, rather than by a pot percolating on the stove top. Once, a blender and a hand-mixer covered most if not all of the bases. Now, though, there is the food processor, the hand-held blender, the spice grinder, the juicer and the large countertop mixer. We have bread machines, yogurt machines, the Insta-pot, the George Foreman Grill, waffle makers, countertop pizza ovens, air-fryers, wine chillers, toaster ovens, rice cookers, panini maker, convection oven, microwave, breakfast sandwich maker, and the indispensable smoothie maker. The toothpick or finger tip have been replaced by an instant read, digital thermometer. Each with their own motor or power source.

VIII.

In the same manner, either by way of chicken or egg, we have increasingly come to understand our own human experience as highly specialized and task-specific. We have this profession or that career, we are someone's mother, father or grandparent, we have a variety of diverse roles to fill and obligations to meet with each of these, seemingly, requiring their own skillset, drive, focus and, if you will, power source.

It used to be, when we talked about the need rest, renew and unplug, we imagined disconnecting one plug from one socket. The great truth, these days, is that now we are tethered to an entire power strip with multiple sockets, plugs and cords all jumbled together and intertwined to create a web of personal complexity in fierce competition with itself which frequently overloads the circuit. We have become the sum of a vast collection of individual motors; whirring, spinning and turning all at the same time. Like hamsters treading a great many wheels all running with a frenetic pace at a high rate of revolutions per minute.

IX.

Enter, once more, the Psalmist. Clearly, we may deduce that some acute, dire event or chronic, desperate situation had prompted the writer to turn to God in prayer that life would be preserved, hopes heard, graciousness given, wonders shown and soul gladdened. Here, though, is the thing: at such a time in life the Psalmist knew, exactly, where to turn and to whom.

The Psalmist's instinct to pray was not a desperate, overgrown or seldom used path, but a return to a well-worn, often traveled and very familiar passage. One that beckoned loudly, was clearly marked, and ran downhill such that the Psalmist was almost carried along with a spiritual momentum that was a moderate and well-paced glide-path to God. Or, said another way, the Psalmist fired up the "Hit and Miss Engine" of faith.

X.

Pulling together the various and, seemingly, disparate parts of this sermon, what I would suggest to us this morning is that rather than see our lives, and the trials and tribulations inherent in them, as highly specialized, task-specific, and requiring an array of power sources, let us take a lesson from history; specifically, turn of the century life and the invention of the "Hit and Miss Engine."

We don't need a multitude of engines with each one necessarily firing all the time, on all 8 cylinders, running full throttle at a high rate of revolutions per minute. Instead, what our lives require most is to chug along with a simple, one cylinder engine of faith which maintains a slow and steady pace; firing when required but otherwise coasting the rest of the time; with a fly-wheel of spiritual momentum providing the stored, potential energy to carry us through even the most difficult of moments and periods in our lives. With this one engine, or power source of faith, being carried to, and employed in, each area of our lives as needed.

XI.

Too often we consider faith to be like a loud, smelly and noxious back-up generator we pull out from the remote recesses of our garage, to dust off, and fire up only during those relatively few moments of emergency when all the lights go out and a deep darkness descends upon us. Instead, let us consider

faith to be a slow and steady source of power, that is easily transported and which can be hooked-up and applied to any area of our life as we need or desire.

Like the “Hit and Miss Engines” of yesteryear, our faith requires attention and tuning, regular maintenance and occasional repair. If we will attend to these tasks through study, worship, prayer and discipleship, however, our faith will provide a life-time of use in every area of our lives to gladden our soul. Snort POP whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh snort POP whoosh...Amen.