

The Reverend's Ruminations

Whew, believe it or not we're all clear! Clear of what, you might wonder? Well, I'm sure some of you probably thought we would still have a few snow piles around in June!?! Spring may not feel like a very long season in southern Minnesota this year—as the high school athletes can attest—but we're all glad it finally took hold. Not the least of these are our farmers, and I pray that their planting season has gone smoothly and safely as God prepares to send moisture and warm sunshine in accordance with creation's plan.

Sunday School has wrapped up a fun-filled transition year, and our Christian Education Board is already making plans for next fall's kick-off. In the meantime, as was recently highlighted during worship announcements, there are great summer camp opportunities available at Pilgrim Point, Lakeshore Center at Okoboji, and other locations. If your child or grandchild has never been to church camp, I hope you'll encourage them to attend; they are a great environment of Christian learning and growth for kids of all ages. As I look at our family calendar for the summer months, it seems like activities are already beginning to fill it, and I'm sure that yours is much the same. So many things to do and people to see, so many "summer-only" places to visit. Where have those seemingly endless lazy summer days of my youth gone?

As you line up your family's getaways for the summer, please include First Congregational United Church of Christ in your plans. We switch to our 9:30am summer schedule starting Memorial Day weekend specifically so that you can worship God and still have most of Sunday available for additional summer activities. Even if you are out of town, I'd like to ask that you remember our congregation with your regular financial gifts. All too often churches find that tithe and offering numbers suffer alongside attendance during the summer months, which can make it hard to keep up with even regular operating expenses.

Some months ago, I heard a comment on a radio program that struck me as a profound truth. The quote, I later found, is credited to a man named Gordon Dahl: "Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship." I don't have to ask whether you can see yourself or someone you know in that description—I know that most of us can identify with his statement.

We are bombarded every day with duties, responsibilities, phone calls, emails, emergency situations, and requests for help (or just a plain visit or meal) from family, friends, neighbors, organizations, co-workers, and sometimes complete strangers! And if we can pull ourselves away from all that work for awhile, then there are always our hobbies. Many of these are worthwhile pursuits in their own right—whether they keep us entertained, happy, healthy, or just plain sane—but they also usually demand time, money, and no small amount of work to be done well.

And where does that leave your worship and spiritual life? Low on the priority list? Something you know you should be doing more regularly, but just can't get to by the time you schedule everything else? And what about when you do get to the worship service? Are you tuned in to the Scripture readings, the prayers, and the sermon, or are you already planning the next part of your day or week in your head? Are you just playing at your worship?

In his Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul writes, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*" (Romans 12:1-2, NRSV)

Now, Paul isn't telling us to give up our jobs, our extra activities, or even our hobbies specifically. In fact, elsewhere in the same letter he even speaks about the civil responsibility of being subject to governing authorities. Paul is not oblivious to the fact that we live in the world and must work to provide for the well being of ourselves and our families. But what he is concerned with is that we are devoting too much of our time and effort to things that have little heavenly consequence. Paul challenges us toward an honest assessment of our priorities and an openness to the discernment of God's will for our lives. Listen closely and honestly, and perhaps you'll find that you've been setting the priorities in your life instead of God. Isn't it time that changed?

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Cory Germain