

The Reverend's Ruminations - September 2021

Recently Ellen and I had a chance to get away for a week in the Blue Ridge Mountains about 20 miles outside of Asheville, North Carolina. As a Presbyterian Federal Chaplaincies training and credentialing event, it wasn't specifically a vacation, but there was time allotted each morning before afternoon classes and discussions for personal devotions and exploration of the surrounding area. We didn't pack to do any serious hiking, but did enjoy strolling the beautiful grounds of Montreat and the many quaint shops of the picturesque neighboring town of Black Mountain.



There is a bit of Congregational UCC connection to Montreat, as the Rev. John C. Collins (a Congregational minister from Connecticut), with a group of other interdenominational clergy and lay leaders, originally purchased the area of 4,500 acres in the mountains of western North Carolina. Their vision was to build a Christian settlement—a mountain retreat (shortened to the name “Montreat”)—where people could come for physical and spiritual renewal. Much of the building and development of the area, including nearby Montreat College, took place in the early 1900s, and the construction of the buildings reflects the craftsmanship of that era. Montreat Presbyterian Church was established in 1906, and the first Presbyterian conference was held in Montreat the following year. Years later, the property became a national conference center of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) when the northern and southern branches of the denomination reunited in 1983.

While you may not have travelled quite as far as North Carolina (or endured the flight delays we encountered), I hope that you and your families have had a chance to enjoy some moments of rest and relaxation this summer. By the time you read this, area schools will be back in session or soon set to resume, and we'll be launching into another busy year of church activities as well. We want to see you back at church as you feel safely able! Sunday School for all ages will be resuming on September 12th, and I want to invite each and every member to find a way in which they can be involved. There are plenty of opportunities to participate in learning, discussing, leading, or volunteering, so let's make this a year of involvement at First Congregational United Church of Christ. If COVID infection rates or preventative measures necessitate format changes in our programs, we'll adapt again—but by now we've gotten pretty good at being flexible!?!

During our September worship services, my sermons will examine the lessons found in the epistle of James. As I encouraged last month, here is another accessibly short book of the Bible: James has only 5 chapters! We'll start with a selection from the first chapter on August 29, and continue through the four Sundays of September, so I challenge you to read ahead to prepare for the upcoming week's worship experience.

Looking ahead to the 5th chapter of James on September 26th, we encounter the reason for two of the prayers we offer each week during worship (confession and intercession):

“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (5:16, NRSV).

Prayer is one of the greatest joys of being in Christian community, and our world needs it now more than ever! See you soon, whether in person or virtually, where we can pray with and for one another.

Yours in Christ's service,

Rev. Cory Germain