

Smoky Mountain Reflections, November 2011

What if all sports clubs and intermural leagues left Sunday mornings alone? What if they decided that on Sunday mornings, giving people a few hours to worship was more important than whatever sport they were playing? What if all places of business said our doors will be closed until noon on Sundays so our employees can have time to go to church if they want to? What if it was the general mind set in our nation that Sunday mornings were off limits and that they should be left alone so nothing else would conflict with a few hours set aside for church? I am not talking about reinstating blue laws. I am not talking about making non-Christians observe our holy day. I am not talking about forcing religion on others in our society. I am simply wondering how it would be if we as a nation whose population claims to be over 80% Christian, would decide as individuals that our place of business, or our club or activity, will not schedule anything that conflicts with a regular time for worship. To my knowledge, the only ones honoring Sunday as a day for rest and worship are Chick-fil-a, the banks, schools, and government offices.

I understand that it is difficult to make it in the business world, but if more businesses simply chose to make Sunday a day of rest, it would become more and more difficult to do business on Sunday. In our area the tourist industry functions on weekends, so many in that business take Mondays as their day of rest. That is why we have a mid-week opportunity for worship at Saint Paul Lutheran Church. However, we as individuals also have the responsibility to make time for the things that are important for us. If you have not been to worship in a long time, it is a reflection of your priorities. The only one you cheat is yourself, because that is the time and place that God has determined He will serve you with Word and Sacrament, forgiveness and fellowship to nurture and strengthen your faith to help you get through another week.

Will many calling themselves Christians still sleep in like the Jews, Muslims, and Seventh Day Adventists who worship on a different day or in a different way? Yes, but is "that is the only day I have to sleep in" a good reason to miss out on God's great gifts for long periods of time, especially if your church also has a different time in the week available for worship? Maybe you are not going for some other reason—long-winded boring preachers, hypocritical parishioners, bad music—I am sorry, but there is no good reason to miss church weeks or months at a time unless you are home bound, in the hospital, or deployed in the military and even in those settings, the church comes to you. I am too busy; I do not like the pastor; I do not like the people; I do not like the church building; I do not like the church grounds; I do not like the music; "I do not like" is not a good reason to violate God's COMMAND to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. There are good God-pleasing ways to deal with every excuse that exists so that you can overcome your perpetual absence whatever the reason (read: excuse). Deal with it and get yourself to church.

We are blessed at Saint Paul to have a very regular attending membership—over 90% of our members attend regularly and over 60% are there on any given Sunday. But the church is a family, and when you are not there, you are missed. We have sadly had to remove people from our membership because they chose to absent themselves for over a year. If you are going to church to get brownie points, you are going for the wrong reason. If you are going out of some sense of obligation to friends or family, this too is a misguided reason. Even if you are going just because you like to, this is not the most God-pleasing reason to go to church. We will still benefit from the Word rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered even if we go for the wrong reasons. However, instead of going because you have to or because you want to, would it not be better to go because you are a redeemed child of God and that is what Christians do? Motivated gladly in Christian freedom, we do as commanded by our Father in heaven, knowing that He has our best interest at heart. When you as a repentant sinner come as a member of His church to receive the great gifts that He has instituted for His bride (the church) to receive in fellowship with Him and each other, you then come as close as you can in this existence to the fellowship, He has in store for you in eternity.

Blessings on your worship experience this week, and if you do not have one, I strongly suggest you look at the times listed below and make every effort to attend either at Saint Paul or at whatever Trinitarian church you call home.

In Christ,
Pastor Portier