



# Pinewood Lutheran Church

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When I was nine or ten I trimmed my first outdoor shrubbery. Dad never liked to trim bushes and basically did a so-so job of it. But for some reason I enjoyed shaping and molding the shrubbery around the old house. So, the job was mine. I found it relaxing, rewarding, and fun. Years later, when my parents were in their new house, I would journey back each June, spend a few extra days, and clip all the bushes in the yard. I did it all by hand, as you cannot properly prune a bush with electric hedge clippers—they rip instead of cut, thus hurting the plant. Mind you, this took a while as they had over 40 arborvitae bushes alone! People in the community would stop by and admire my efforts and ask my mother: “How did you get the shrubbery so precise and perfect?” She would glowingly respond: “My son does it for me!” Later in life as a teen, I volunteered my skills at my grandparent’s house, employed it at our college as a summer job, and in Ames, IA (my first parish) I even won a community award for the parsonage grounds! Here at Pinewood I don’t get to spend as much time as I’d like to trim our “woods” but when I do I find it relaxing. Yes, you can find relaxation in the seemingly mundane....

So, what about you? What menial task do you secretly, or not-so-secretly, enjoy doing? I’ve known people for whom mowing the lawn is a passion. Some people truly enjoy cleaning their house and making it shine. Others have a penchant for folding laundry. On my boyhood paper-route, a few of the older folks obviously had a “thing” about snow removal from their sidewalks! No matter when I delivered their paper, even amid a snowstorm, it was always clean down to the concrete! My favorite tale, which my mother related to me, is of a schoolteacher’s wife who loved to iron—everything. She even ironed all the household underwear!!! (Let’s hope she didn’t use starch....)

Let’s dissect why people have a love affair with the mundane. I think it is for multiple reasons. One, you can let your mind wander and flow. This is a way of processing the stuff of life and formulating a plan as to how to handle it all. Two, it can be a creative outlet. Let’s face it, we all have a creative side and increasingly in this world, it’s hard to find ways of feeding it. Three, it leads to a sense of accomplishment. You can see what you just did and feel good about it. In our tech age, much of what we do ends up unseen, disappearing into the black hole of the internet or company bureaucracy. Having an accomplished end result visible to your eye which you can stand back and admire feeds the psyche. Four, it breeds “down-time” (related to #1), all of which fills the well inside. And five, if your particular passion also physically tires you out, you sleep a lot less fitfully.

When God kicked Adam and Eve out of Eden and gave them marching orders for life, He included this statement: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread.” In other words, God ordained work. Up to that point work was never a burden for our progenitors. But now,

it would breed mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion. But, God always includes a silver-lining in everything, and I believe people try to discover and hopefully find that silver lining in the mundane that I've just described. For me, when I'm frustrated or out-of-sorts, I revert to this mode. I go and trim bushes and trees, enjoying the tactile feeling of a good pruner in my hand. It's almost a creative outlet for me. I get to sculpt and mold living plants by using my creative eye. I just wish I had more time to employ my skills!

Likewise, for me, painting a house or a wall (ceilings are just plain old work) breeds a sense of great satisfaction. I cannot spend the hours at it that I once did, as my stamina isn't that of a 25 year old any more. But once I get started, it seems to energize me. It feels good to make something old look new. It feels good to finish the task, stand back, and think: "It's just right!"

I know most of modern society focuses on getting rid of menial tasks by means of: hiring it done, employing robots to free up our time, using modern power tools to hasten the result, etc. But I'm not sure that's always a good thing. It may look nice in the end, but where's the sense of accomplishment? Where's the good night's sleep? Where's the personal creativity?

God created us to use our special talents and abilities in a way which would give us a sense of accomplishment. Maybe this is why eating a lovingly well-cooked meal always seems to taste better than restaurant fare? Maybe it's also why taking an old, scuffed up pair of dress shoes and giving them a good polish until they gleam once more puts an added spring to our step!

So, what about you? Are you so caught-up in the rat-race of life, feel over-whelmed and emotionally empty because the menial has been neglected? Maybe it's time to watch less TV, set limits to the "electronic devices that control your every waking moment, and set aside a little time each day to "embrace the menial"! It's amazing what you can actually get accomplished and even more amazing is that it all feels good! "By the sweat of your brow" isn't always a bad thing after all.....

Pastor Thomas H. Fox