

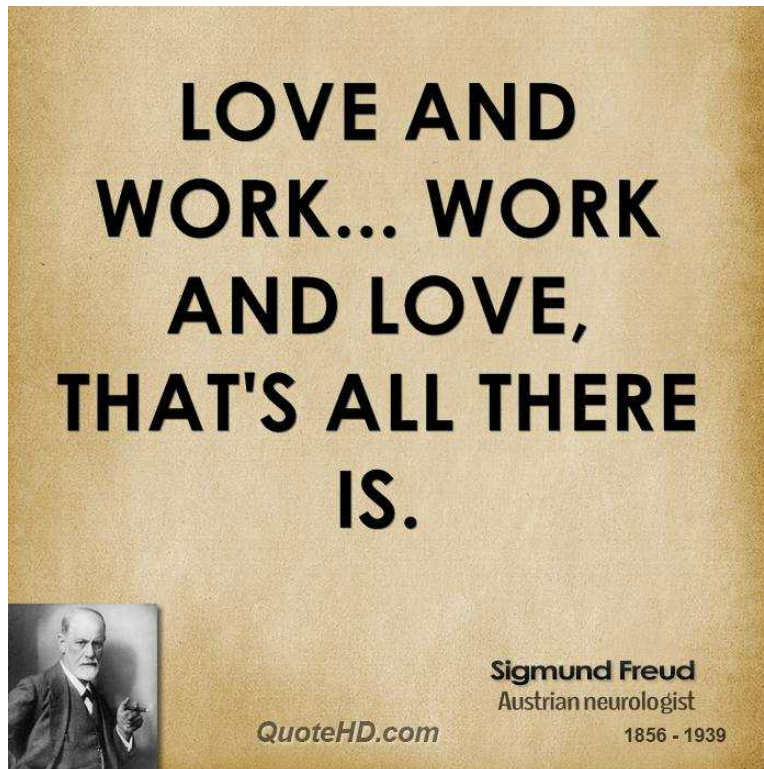
## WORK

*Script for Sermon Preached by the Rev. Douglas Clark, September 4, 2016  
Ordinary 23 – HCC, 9:00 a.m.; FCCH, 10:30 a.m. – Communion  
“In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, diversity; in all things, charity”*

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:31 – 2:3

God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.



Somewhere in my past—I don't remember where or when—I heard that when Sigmund Freud was asked about the meaning of life, he replied: “Love and work. Work and love. That's all there is.” Perhaps in response to a similar question, he said: “Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.”

With apologies to Dr. Freud, here is my response to questions about life's meaning and purpose: “Love and work. Play and prayer. That's what it's all about.” Or: “Love and work, play and prayer, are the cornerstones of our humanness.” (I'm using “prayer” as shorthand for “spiritual practices,” including congregational worship and community outreach.)

For the four Sundays in the month of September, I'll be preaching a sermon series on these four foundation stones of our humanness: work, love, play, and prayer. Today, recognizing Labor Day weekend, my theme is work. I have taken as my text the Genesis narrative about God's creation work and sabbath rest.

My understanding of this text is of course shaped by my own experiences of work. I grew up in a suburb of Springfield, MA, in the 1950's, when men were expected to be breadwinners and women were expected to be homemakers. There was an easy rhythm to life in those days: my Dad, Lester Clark, went to work during the week; my brother Gordon and I went to school during the week; and my Mom, Evelyn Clark, took care of our home and family. On Saturdays we ran errands; on Sundays we went to church.

My father was my role model. Dad, who had grown up on a farm and had come of age during the Great Depression, was a member of the civic generation. He served in the Army Air Corps as a weather observer in the Panama Canal Zone during World War II. When he was discharged from the military after the war ended, he took a job as a laboratory technician at a chemical company that later became a subsidiary of Monsanto; he continued in this same career with the same company until he took early retirement at age 63.

I started college in 1963 with the expectation that I would follow in my father's footsteps with a career in science. But by the time I graduated, in 1967, I had decided instead that I wanted to become a professor of German language and literature. This career intention was derailed by the escalation of the draft for the Vietnam War, which I had come to believe was an immoral and unjust war. I applied for, and was eventually granted, conscientious objector status, which then led me to Bangor Theological Seminary and a career as a local church pastor in the United Church of Christ. By the time I retire in 2017, I will have spent more than forty years as an ordained minister, doing the work of ministry in a variety of denominational and geographical settings.

My Dad was a blue-collar worker; in my memory, he never wore a shirt and tie to work. In my younger days, I did blue-collar labor; but for most of my working life, I've been a white-collar professional. I inherited the assumption that the work of a college-educated, white-collar professional was superior to that of a

non-college-educated blue-collar worker. But I no longer operate with this deeply flawed assumption. I have the utmost respect for all the different kinds of work that people do in the twenty-first century.

Until yesterday, I had never heard of a woman named Freia David. According to *The Boston Globe*, [Freia David](#) retired this past week after working for 32 years at the McDonald's in Needham, MA. What's unique about her story is that she is a woman born with Down Syndrome.

“When Freia David began working at McDonald’s through an innovative program to place adults with cognitive disabilities in community jobs, her mother worried. What if the work was too hard? What if she didn’t fit in?”

“While two of her peers did not finish the six-month training, the young woman with Down syndrome quickly warmed to the fast-food work, wiping down counters, filling ketchup dispensers, and greeting customers with a smile. Then she got a chance at the french fry station, and Freia David — whose given name sounds like ‘fryer’ spoken with a strong Boston accent — responded as if she were born to it.

“That was 1984.

“For the next 32 years, five days a week, she has spent the lunch rush frying, salting, and boxing fries at the Needham McDonald’s, always arriving an hour early, sometimes dancing in place before the stainless steel Frymaster. On Saturdays, she returns with her mother to eat lunch and see friends, day-off visits filled with hugs and high-fives.

“Freia David, 52, was closing in on 1 million pounds of fries served when her mother, Anneliese, an elegant and energetic 90, noticed that her daughter was showing signs of forgetfulness. Early onset dementia is common among people with Down syndrome, and Anneliese David worried for her daughter's safety around fryer oil and heat lamps.

“She urged her daughter to retire. Am I being fired? David asked her mother. No, she reassured her. But it was time to go.

“The job had meant everything to David, her mother said. It had been ‘her life.’ But when David announced she was leaving, how much she meant to the restaurant instantly became clear. Management hung a banner celebrating her 32 years and invited the community to a retirement party.

“The Davids expected a few old friends to show up Monday. Instead, more than 100 people packed the McDonald’s — loyal customers, former neighbors, adults with disabilities and their relatives, and many others — all there to wish David well.

“They sent her off in style — two cakes, a silver necklace adorned with a fry-carton pendant, a cut-crystal model of the restaurant, a collection of photo

collages, and a stack of heart-felt cards, along with a set of her favorite Disney stuffed animals and a proclamation from the state House of Representatives.”<sup>1</sup>

I hope that when Freia David in her retirement looks back on all the work she did for 32 years at the Needham McDonald's, she will see that it was good. I hope that when I retire, I will look back on the work of ministry that I have done, and I will see that it was good. I hope that when each of us on this day of rest looks back on the work we have done, we will see that it was good.

**(Pastoral Prayer for Sept. 4, 2016:**

**Hinge Time – Richard L. Floyd – UCC Daily Devotion for Sept. 4, 2016)**

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."* —Ecclesiastes 3:1

September always feels to me to be a new beginning. It marks time like a turning hinge, from summer to fall, from then to now, and from now to "what now?"

September's cool weather reminds me of one memorable day back in 1982. We lived in Maine on a farm. We had a new baby, our first child, and we were in transition. I was about to take a new job and we would soon be moving to a new state.

It was Labor Day weekend, and my Dad and his wife Virginia (my mother died in 1967) had come up to see the new grandchild.

That night we went down the road to the next small town to eat, nothing fancy, but good Maine summer fare: steamers, lobster, sugar and butter corn, some blueberry pie.

Driving home I noticed a spectacular display of the Northern Lights. When we arrived we took some lawn chairs and sat silently in the dark for an hour, watching this extraordinary display of God's grandeur. I have never seen anything like it, before or since.

I took it all in, the sky, my family, my wife and new child. Life was good if a bit uncertain. That day was a hinge time for me.

It was my Dad's last September for he died the next July. These rare moments God gives us when life seems especially good are to be embraced and remembered. Like this great September weather they only last so long.

**Prayer:** For the gift of life and the promise of eternal life, we give you thanks, O God.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.bostonglobe.com/2016/08/29/retire/qVU7HV3vbnS65kjgbeZwgI/story.html>.