

## Post-Sabbatical Letter

September, 2016

Dear friends,

I wasn't convinced that a sabbatical was a good idea. I thought it seemed really extravagant and indulgent. I had run every disaster scenario and I was afraid the risk was too great. But I trusted the advice and experience of others that an extended time of rest was helpful. I finally admitted to myself that I actually needed a break about one month into my sabbatical. I woke up one morning and my head and my heart were quiet. I wasn't thinking about what could be done better. I wasn't thinking about ideas for sermons or leading worship. Instead, I was able to reflect on my understanding of what it meant to be a pastor. What it meant to be a church in this time and this place. How a disaster, like a flood, can squeeze the best and worst out of me.

Why did I even need convincing? There were several things going on in me- but one huge factor to get over was my sense of shame. This shame was coming from my need in looking good by working hard. I realized I valued work as a source of my identity. I wouldn't admit that- my head would have caught it before it escaped my mouth. But I had bought into it. This looked like doing the things that people wanted me to do- whether or not it was a part of my call or whether I decided I should be doing it. This worked well after August 2011 only compounding the problem. I told myself if I couldn't achieve my unrealistic sense of excellence, at least I could work hard. Stopping or saying 'no' was not something I did very well. I am backed up in the culture on this: we make fun of France's short workweeks; naps are for the bumbling, lazy cartoon character and weekends are now for working at home or another job. Sundays, the traditional day of rest, have been taken over by sports, chores, along with a good dose of family activities. It wasn't a helpful pattern that was going to serve me well long-term. But first I had to stop.

I would be happy to share with you the pictures of what I did and where we went. And though I traveled over 12,000 miles, the greatest distance I had to overcome was the one in myself. Most of this happened on the back porch in a posture of prayer. It cost nothing but a few minutes every morning. It took no ability or learned skill. It took a change of routine and the courage to wait. My head and my heart started to talk again. I was becoming aware of how God was giving me rest, answering my questions, and providing for what I needed.

I also see how valuable this time was for the church as well. Guest pastor Lynn Brown was present and available. She led worship, facilitated two groups talking about personal gifting for service and was available for pastoral needs. From all reports, her time here was positive and encouraging. The sabbatical time has also set the table to continue conversations that have been ongoing for years. *We wrestle with: What is the church about? What should we be doing? Should we change how we do things? And why don't we have enough money (and how do we get more)?* and many more. The conversations will continue so look for ways to participate. I would also encourage you to listen to how God is inviting you to forward. I would also encourage you: you can take a break. You can take the time and make the space to listen to God. Start with a Sabbath of some sort, practice daily prayer, discern what is really important in your life right now and be free to say no to other stuff- even if it's good.

I am excited to be with you again while I try to figure out a healthy balance. I am looking forward to continue to living life together and having conversations about what that looks like for you and for us together. In God's peace-

In Christ,

PJK