

## PASTOR MIRIAM'S POST-SABBATICAL SUMMARY September 2018

Both Clayton and I feel a deep sense of gratitude to the church and countless individuals who gave of their time and resources, prayer and action, so that we could take time with enough resources to deepen our spiritual relationship and strengthen our marriage. After 8 years of marriage, 7 years of ministry, and 3 years with our lovely daughter Eleanor, we believe this 3-month Sabbatical to be the precise blessing we needed at the right time.



Nearing the Sabbatical, I triple checked information left to new ministers...these being the numerous volunteers who rose to the opportunity and challenge to lead at FPC & Serious JuJu. And they did! I thought letting go and missing out on pivotal moments in the life of the congregation and our skateboarders would be intolerable; yet, as the Sabbatical progressed, I grew calmer trusting in God's sovereignty and in the community's power to care for one another.

Being given the gift of time, I shared it with others: taking time to nurture new friendships, taking Eleanor to her first swim lessons, hiking new trails, returning to the pottery wheel, dismantling an old chandelier and filling it with new creations of stained glass, finishing a few books and beginning a few more, meeting more community leaders and worshipping with congregations that propel the Gospel of God's generosity, provision, justice and grace. Clayton even got me to join



him on a fishing expedition on the Blackfoot River and this novice caster caught fish! Joining in Clayton's passion for fishing was exceedingly rewarding as I waded into deeper waters with him too. In this season, I read literature that took me through deep waters of confession and revealed truths in plain sight. As I took inventory and cleaned my interior life, I began to focus on cleaning the exterior life...which eventually led to a yard sale at summer's end.

In the beginning, Eleanor continually asked when I was going to JuJu and the church. She was grateful to have mom home but a bit miffed that churches on Sundays were never "mommy's church." It was a joy –seldom felt by a pastor- to sit with my daughter in worship, and at the beginning of her life, help her learn to worship. Eleanor now has her favorite Bible stories and I have enjoyed passing on songs of faith from my childhood. Eleanor needs a kids choir to sing in – she sings all the time! Yet, surprisingly, I too and hoping to join a community choir to sing, renew my voice and be part of the chorus and melodies of our community...music was most integral in my early life.

Finally, Clayton and I give thanks for the exceedingly powerful, restorative gift of a pilgrimage to Scotland. International travel has eluded our early years of married life with mortgages, degrees to pay for, a new child, and work. Reaching beyond our corner of the world, we were counted among God's global humanity, a citizen of the world. On our pilgrimage, we encountered great kindness from all walks of life, including many memorable people who enhanced the journey and lightened the load. Driving on the left side of



the road presented numerous occasions for holding one's breath and learning to be a better team player, which means trusting your teammate. Conversations on the roadways of Scotland were rich and expansive. We gained traction in all corners of our marriage even deposited the car unscathed!

Worship on Iona was sublime. One banjo sparked voices filling a 1500-year old Abbey to the brim with song. Liturgy written by the community took my breath away as I found space for wonder and prayer. Clayton and I walked and



biked the island from head to foot and marveled at the island being both an ancient refuge for believers and remaining uniquely positioned as a powerful, preeminent voice for environmental, social and political justice enduring despite the storms that assail the island and our world.



There I renewed my dancing feet from decades past at St. Andrews University and danced in a community ceilidh...an event drawing out locals of all generations. Joy filled my heart.

Contrasting stories of Presbyterian faith were on display in St. Andrews and Edinburgh. The Scottish National Museum and the House of John Knox told grievous tales of a newly reformed church addressing the sins of the people with bluster, fervor and distain. The church stood as judge, jury, and executioner. Iron shackles, sackcloth, sinner stools, communion tokens and beggar's badges told the history of a church I hardly recognize as my own. John Knox preached so forcefully and scornfully that rioters took to streets to destroy cathedrals. As a mother, I can hardly imagine the levels of persecution leveled on Queen Mary that forced her to abandon her 1-year old son to escape with her life. Still, we have much to learn from our past and from a clearer comprehension of our church's faults and failures inform our attempts to model Christ today.

A great highlight involved sharing my university time at St. Andrews with Clayton. We spent the day connecting key moments of 19-year old Miriam's faith transformation with 37-year old Miriam and the life Clayton and I share that stems from that pivotal time at St. Andrew. The return was deeply moving: returning with Clayton to a place I dearly love that makes me -in large part- the Christian I am today.



From a rainy walk to a lighthouse on the western edge of Skye, to a death-defying descent down a mountain top in Glencoe as rain set in, exploring the ancient landscape provided these pilgrims with a multitude of opportunities to pause, reflect and give thanks for all storms endured and all heights reached. Our last great view was sitting atop a mountain where the lowlands meet the Highlands overlooking Loch Lomond. From this new vantage point, we easily imagined the view of Flathead Valley and spoke of our dreams for

this new life continuing upon our return to Montana. What we know clearly is that we love this community and wish to remain in the valley a very long time. As a pastor I wish to play a role in the community's transformation, the making of a better community, all modeled on Christ and the Good News.