

## How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Let me begin by saying it is good to be home!! My mother in law always says, "If you don't go away you can't come home." Our continuing education/ministry exchange with George to Scotland was wonderful, and our holiday in Ireland was really fun!

I want to start today by sharing a few photos with you of the 3 churches that George serves, and then just some other highlights. Then I want to share with you what any of this had to do with Jesus.

(Show photos and talk briefly about them)

Worship in the 3 small churches where George serves, is very traditional. All the music is from a hymnbook, played on an organ. The minister chooses all the music. The minister does everything in worship except read the Scripture. The churches are very old, they all have pews, some of the churches smell musty and they feel damp. The clerk of session at one of the churches told me that George will be their last full time minister. Following his ministry, there is little hope that the 3

churches can afford to continue. The average age I would guess would be close to 75.

In one of the congregations, 3 distinct seating sections were pointed out to us. In days gone by, but not too long ago, these sections were owned by wealthy families in the area. Only members of their family were allowed to sit in these sections.

The three churches participate in community outreach. They care for one another. There is both unity and division among the 3 congregations.....some members in each congregation do not wish to amalgamate with the other congregations.....some members in each congregation will not support events in either of the other congregations. It appears that not unlike many other churches in Scotland, one or all of these churches will be listed for sale and eventually, sadly will be re-purposed.

Travelling about the beautiful city of Edinburgh, I entered a church that was presenting a brief exhibit on The Reformation. I spent

some time there, becoming aware of some personalities I had not heard of before who were instrumental in The Protestant Reformation. I learned about some of the atrocities which I had not been aware of that gave rise to the need for reformation. I have decided to dig deeper into that information which is so integral to being a Reformed church – a church that took a stand against what was then perceived to be undue control and abuse by the Roman Catholic Church. It has inspired me to preach a series on the Reformation this fall which I hope will give us all a solid understanding of what it means for us as a Presbyterian congregation, to be Reformed.

I truly appreciate the opportunity to have had time away. It gave me some distance – some space – a change in perspective. It gave me a chance to consider what it is I have to offer, what I need to work on, what it is I need to address, what difference I can still make.

The Shepherd's Psalm invites us to lie down, to rest, to get restored. In Matthew Jesus calls all who are weary, all who are carrying heavy

burdens, that he will give us rest. In Mark, he calls his disciples to come away to a deserted place and rest. From time to time, we all need that. You need it. I need it.

Our time in Ireland gave me a greater appreciation the potential we have to enjoy the journey with one another. It didn't seem to matter who or where, the Irish people always seemed ready to chat, to help out, ready to have a laugh. There never seemed to be an urgency.

There never seemed to be anything more important than the immediate moment. Their hospitality was unmatched. Their kindness and helpfulness was incomparable. I know there is so much more to the story of the Irish people, and not all of it good, but this is the part we experienced and which we want to learn from.

Our time in Ireland with the people gave me a reason to reflect. How happy am I to stop and speak with a stranger? How comfortable am I to offer hospitality to someone I have never met? How big of a rush do we need to be in?

Heather and I arrived by train to a lovely sea side town. A middle aged couple was sitting out in front of a Pub. I told them we had just arrived in the area and asked which way we should go to see the highlights of the town. The man, with a big smile on his face said he would not help us out until we sat down and had a pint with he and his wife. An hour and a half later we said our goodbyes and moved on.

I asked myself when I have ever offered such hospitality. I asked myself how guarded I am when approached for any reason by a stranger. We talk about being brothers and sisters of one another, but do we really act like that in our daily lives?

We have many examples of how people took their time, went out of their way, and took care of us. A man in Scotland named Lindsay is a maker of haggis. He stopped what he was doing and took us to 4 different businesses until he found a city map for us!

It seems to me that we are often so focused, so intent on the task at hand, our agenda.....that other people are simply shapes and shadows

to avoid. It made me wonder how Jesus moved through his days....how much time he had for others.....how he offered hospitality....how much he went out of his way for others.

Jesus told his disciples to travel light and to depend on the hospitality of strangers – for food and accommodation.

Reading through the Gospels, even when his disciples tried to curtail it, Jesus insisted that whoever wanted to have time with Jesus, had an opportunity. He had or made time for everyone. Sometimes they had to climb a tree, or be lowered down through a hole in the roof.

Sometimes they had to walk miles to get a glimpse of him. Sometimes a parent went to Jesus and asked him to come to their home to heal their child.....It is difficult if not impossible to find an example of when Jesus did not have or make time for anyone who wanted his attention.

I'm not sure that I move through life with the same grace and ease and compassion. Do you?

We need to make sure we get restored in order to be Christ's disciples.

For some it is a gallop down a beach or sitting and being inspired by beautiful gardens. For others it is paddling a canoe on a quiet lake. For some it is climbing a big hill. It can be different for every one of us.

But if we are going to take seriously, Christ's call to discipleship, to be His light in the world, we need to take good care of ourselves, that we might equip ourselves to serve.

Amen