

Back from Sabbatical

At the start of my three months, I was worried about time and how I would fill it. Without the duties of a parish priest what was I? Or, to be precise, *who* was I? It's interesting the extent to which productivity defines our worth and value in society. For example, how natural is it to ask me what I *did* during my Sabbatical, rather than how I experienced it or how has it changed me? It's hard to quantify feelings and change, but it's easy to say what I did or didn't do. But that last question has perhaps been the driving force behind my reason for a sabbatical. I wanted to feel different afterwards. I wanted to pause to allow myself to see and feel the difference. Because of course we are always changing, and my life is generally fast-paced, and I don't give myself enough time to catch up with my shadow or thoughts. Unsurprisingly, it took a few weeks to settle but by the start of July I was beginning to relax into 'pause' time and felt myself unravelling with retreats, prayer, rest and painting being my framework to play around. Within all of this was listening.

It's not always easy to withdraw from the people who help you to see who you are and make you feel you belong in this world (that's you - Marston and Elsfeld!). It is, though, wonderful to fall into the One who created me and tells me I am enough. I am enough not because of my productivity but because of my ordinary unique self, which is neither better nor worse than anyone else. It is so refreshing to look at the stars and realise it's ok to leave tasks unfinished ... and to leave them unfinished the next day too. Actually, what we do is less important than how we feel about ourselves and our place in this gorgeous world, because that image or thought about ourselves is often the driving force behind growth and change, and whether we want to notice the change or not.

Sabbaticals are gifts which are not given to everyone, so I am so grateful for being able to recharge the batteries, sink into the ground and allow creativity and possibility to flow. This has been so refreshing. I loved sitting in the garden and staring at the birds and bees to see where they wander or closing my eyes and getting lost in the sounds; I loved putting on my favourite music and picking up the oil paints to see what happened next; I loved spending time in turn with my family members and exploring something new together or simply enjoying a meal. I picked up a new habit whilst I was on Sabbatical, which is mid-day prayer. I found it so helpful to pause and pray.

Thank you for giving me this space! I am so grateful for the churchwardens for shielding my time and going beyond their role on occasions. For the ministry team taking on extra and covering all sorts of services, for all our guest leaders presiding and preaching and for all of you letting me be for a bit.

I am sure I need more time to process these past few months and sit with that question of what change has happened in me. In the meantime, it's been a wonderful three months, but nothing beats coming home.