

Amy's Email Epistle – Thursday, September 20, 2018

Friends,

It is good to be home! What an adventure Mia and I have had. We spent 10 days in Spain walking the final stage of the Camino de Santiago. (over 100 miles) It was difficult, painful, joy filled, amazing, spiritual, life-changing and we are already discussing when we might be able to go back and walk more of it. We spent a few days recuperating in Barcelona before heading to Italy. In Italy we explored Venice for several days, enjoying the beauty and the history of that famous city before taking a train to Florence where we met up with family and friends. We spent two days taking in sights, sounds, food, and incredible art in that ancient city then together traveled by train to Orte where we settled into a beautiful country Villa that became our home away from home. Ashleigh joined us at the Villa making our total 12. Family and friends together in one large beautiful house for 10 exceptional days. For ten days we lived in community experiencing the stunning beauty of the Umbria countryside, the deep history of the small village, the excitement of Rome, the solemnity of Pompeii....laughter, tears, joy, love. At the end of our time in Italy, Ashleigh, my niece Ana, Mia and I traveled on to England where we spent 10 days exploring London and surrounding areas. A highlight was attending *Harry Potter and The Lost Child* on stage in SoHo and a backstage tour of the Harry Potter Warner Bros. studio. A personal highlight was visiting Oxford, England and walking the streets where two of my favorite authors spent time together - C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. It was a once in a lifetime trip. One that I am still reveling in, and still processing.

The rest of the summer was spent on small trips, working on writing my dissertation for my Doctorate degree, and spending time at home. I was able to travel to Indianapolis to visit my parent's and family. It was a joy to play with my great nieces and nephews. My parent's, sister, and niece joined Ashleigh and I on a trip to Saugatuck, Michigan where we spent 5 days enjoying the beauty of Lake Michigan.

Mia and I tried out our new tent at Wenatchee State Park for a weekend getaway. Although we could not have a campfire because of the nearby wildfires we enjoyed the breathtaking views and were grateful for the wind off of the lake that cleared the air of smoke. The final weekend of sabbatical was Labor day. As a cap to the end of such a wonderful and adventure filled summer, and in celebration of our 3rd anniversary we went to Victoria, B.C. for the long weekend. It was a perfect ending to a perfect sabbatical. We had so much fun on sabbatical - Such rich spiritual experiences, family bonds and friendship bonds were deepened- It was beyond a good time, it was life changing.....and it is good to be home!

I want to thank you for allowing me the time for rest, renewal, travel and learning. Thank you to the sabbatical team who did an fantastic job of planning for the congregation. An especially big thank you to Mary who went over and above while I was gone, and to Don who also went above and beyond especially with the opening of the cooling center this summer. And of course I am thankful to the Lily Foundation for their generosity. Without the Lily grant I would never have been able to take this trip of a lifetime.

One of my insights from sabbatical is to spend more time not just being grateful, but expressing gratitude. I am grateful to First Christian Church - for your willingness to embrace change, to say yes even when those around are saying no. To embrace the impossible and to be a living witness of God's inclusive love. Thank you.

It's good to be home.

Amy