

I have to admit, this back-to-school time of year has always been my favorite. The heat is beginning to break a bit, and we can imagine cooler nights coming as our days get just a tiny bit shorter. We balance between wanting to savor every last drop of the summer exuberance and freedom that have swelled the last two months, days filled with travel and family chaos and laughter - and on the other hand, needing to get back to a more structured and steady way of life, a place to catch our breath before the hectic excitement of the winter holidays.

Suddenly, I am making time to get to the beach, to see a movie, to grill everything I can think of because I've let too much of the summer pass me by. In my frantic savoring of summer, I finally brought Eliza for her first experience of the Ocean, hoping she would understand the magic of the ocean, that she might hear it's voice, feel the power of its waves, and know - as I do - that there is a power greater than just us humans, that there is something sacred and eternal that pulses through this world, a power that we can connect to if we try. As I carried her out into the waves, she clung to me with all her strength; this water was different from what she'd ever known before and she was scared. But she grinned and giggled and nodded that she was okay. So I held her tight and let the cold water cover her legs, the waves lapping at her belly. Feeling my arms around her, she used one arm to explore the water, taste it, trying to catch seaweed (still clinging to mom with the other arm).

Sometimes we forget that God is at the center of all we are doing, alive and well in our relationships and our giving of our time and energy. For me, the ocean always reminds me of this truth. And this year, Eliza really helped me see it with fresh eyes. Life will bring us new experiences, and it's totally natural to be scared. But when we remember that we are not alone, that we are loved, then we can hold tight to the relationships that stabilize us and reach out with the other hand, into the great unknown. And OH what beauty and adventure awaits! When I looked up, I realized how many eyes were glued to me and Eliza; the joy and wonder she was experiencing had captivated most of the folks on the beach around us. I could not help but grin at the magic of community happening around me, strangers pausing together in a moment of sunshine and whimsy and love.

So as you dry out your swimsuit and knock the sand out of your sandals, I invite you to think about what you gained this summer that you can hold on to, and bring back with you into our shared ministries. Was there rest and relaxation you can hold on to? Was their laughter and playfulness? Was there the courageous work of setting a boundary? Was there the kind of dreaming and hope that strengthens your drive? Was there realizations about new limitations, that mean you might need to let others share in your journey in newly helpful ways? Was there a loss that has left a raw and tender spot, a space that might be an invitation to the rest of us to invest our energies in surrounding you with prayers by holding you in God's light? Have you mastered spitting watermelon seeds farther than your grandson? Where did you notice God shining through? Whatever you've gained this summer, bring it back with you, into our shared worship and ministries. Because we want to hear all about it!