



I've never really understood it to tell you the truth. I've been party to so many conversations in and around so many churches during the early summer, lamenting the months ahead. Those conversations have almost always revolved around attendance. It is no secret that virtually all churches – save those that are steps from some beach somewhere – wane in attendance during the summer. My experience has proven that to be true, to a degree, and I understand why that generates a bit of anxiety. It is easier for worship to be a fuller, richer experience in a room full of worshipers, than one with a few empty pews. Churches also operate on shared resources. If many of the faithful aren't around, in the summertime, to share said resources, budget meetings can be worrisome. I see those anxieties, and, I confess, I've felt them, but these

are unnecessary and maybe even counterproductive concerns. Worship isn't intended to reach new heights of emotion every week. In fact, the week in/week out consistency of practice, even through times that aren't quite as celebratory as others, may well be one of the greatest strengths of collective worship. If God's grace has been celebrated in corporate worship through times of turmoil and chaos, we would have a hard time even imagining it not being present through the summer. It will take more than a few gaps among the pews in June, July, and August to squelch the praise of God. And, if God turned water into wine and kept the oil jar from running dry, then God can use the careful planning of our dedicated Trustees and Council to keep the coffers from running dry. No, summer doesn't scare me. I've never really understood the lament.

In fact, I'm grateful for the summer months. The slower pace of activity acts as something of a sabbath season for our staff and committees. We have an opportunity to catch our breath, review the program year, and look ahead to what comes next with fresh eyes and rested minds. I'm certainly grateful for that, but my gratitude goes further. Those emptier-than-usual pews I mentioned – I'm actually grateful for them. If you're wedded to the idea that the measure of a church's success is a head count or if you're a budget hawk, you might need to take a minute, at this point, and breathe deeply a few times before reading on. I didn't misspeak. I really am grateful for the emptier pews.

Don't get me wrong. I love this community. I love YOU dearly—and I cherish the moments we spend together in worship and fellowship, but, the absences we see in the pews does mean something. It means many among us are traveling this summer. Some of you will be going on deeply needed vacations. Others of you will take advantage of the season to travel—to take care of vocational responsibilities or family needs. You'll rest up or experience some adventure; you'll learn something new or foster new or enriched relationships—and when you've finished your journey, you will be back among us. The experiences you've had will inform your life going forward, a life you've chosen to share with us! How fortunate are we to benefit from the cultural imports that will travel back from so many places! I can't wait to hear your stories.

If you are traveling this summer, you'll also carry with you the particular brand of **love for the world** that comes from being part of FBCR. If in your travels, you should find yourself among another worshipping community, please convey greetings from their siblings -in-faith in Rochester. Or perhaps your travels will not carry you to worship but instead you will drink deeply of the experiences God provides you and consider that your act of worship. *Pass the love fostered here to all those you encounter.* The rest of us will be joyful in knowing that the love made known in this place is being spread afar and that the love made known in other places is coming back with you.

Let me invite you to share your summer journey with the rest of the congregation. Throughout the summer months, we will have a white board for anyone who will be away, for a week, a month, or the entire summer, to let the rest of the congregation know where you'll be and what you'll be up to. If you would like to post a picture of yourself/your family, your destination, or an itinerary of your trip, there will be magnets available for hanging those things. If you're nowhere near that prepared, just use one of the available markers or pens to write a bit about where you're headed and when you'll be gone. This will give us all a sense of our togetherness, even as we travel.

Of course, you may not be away at all this summer. Worry not. Even if things are a bit slower and even if our population is thinner for a while, you will still find a welcoming and hearty congregation together each Sunday, and a time or two between. I look forward to seeing you when I do—and sending you with prayers when I don't.

Traveling Mercies, dear ones.

Pastor Brent