

Missing church

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It was 8:30 on a Sunday morning, and I was in my pajamas eating blueberry pancakes with my family. It was lovely. It was also downright weird.

Less than a mile away, my congregation was settling down to worship without me, as they did most Sundays while I was on maternity leave. I could picture them gathering, setting up the sanctuary, turning on the coffee. I could imagine the acolyte getting ready as the pianist started the prelude. It was so strange not to be there.

In recent years, there have not been many Sundays when I've been able to sip coffee while I linger over the newspaper. So I wasn't quite sure what to do with myself on these Sunday mornings, when I was not expected to be anywhere but home, nursing and snuggling my newborn son.

I know I'm not indispensable. Good ministry happened at this church before I got there, and it'll go on long after I'm gone. I knew they would all be fine for the weeks I was away.

It's just
that I missed them.

I'll
admit that part of the reason I love congregational ministry is the regular
affirmation I get about the work I do. Even the generic "good sermon" is
usually enough to get me through the week. If I'm honest, that's part of what I
missed. When I was home with the new baby, nobody was telling me what a good
job I
did with that last diaper change.

But it was
more than that. I missed the people; I missed being part of the community. I missed
the hugs. I wished I could go to the potluck dinners and sit with my kids. I wished
I could go to worship and sit in the pews. I wished I could take off my pastor
hat for a few weeks and simply be one of the family.

We did go
to worship one Sunday, when our son was not quite three weeks old. It was good
to be there, but it was confusing for all of us. A couple of people approached
me with prayer concerns, and I had to bite my tongue to keep from asking how
the board meeting went or how the new preschool teacher was working out. It was
hard to be among them and not be their pastor.

This was
complicated by the fact that my husband and daughter, wanting to keep up their
commitments and participation, sometimes went to church without me. One Sunday
as
they were getting ready for church, I snapped at my husband about something
unimportant and realized that I was jealous. Jealous that he got to see the
people I care about, that he got to catch up on what was going on, that he can
be a part of the church family in a way that I'll never be.

They
left, and I nursed the baby. I decided that I needed to be in worship. I packed
us up and went to a church in the neighborhood where my friend is the pastor. I
knew she wouldn't mind if my son squawked during the sermon.

How

strange it was to slip in when the prelude had already started, to find a seat in the back row. How welcoming to be greeted by ushers who didn't know my name. How comforting to be surrounded by church people who had also forgone their lazy Sundays to worship together in the presence of God.

It was a

communion Sunday. I was glad, because it's always communion Sunday in my tradition, and worship feels funny without it. The deacons smiled at my sleeping baby as they passed me the bread and the cup. We shared the feast, and I thought of my own church folks, who were doing the very same thing a few blocks away. And I remembered: I am part of the body of Christ, the family of God.