



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

Are you there God?, Pt 2
The Art of Slowing

Mark 6:31–32 and selected verses
from the Psalms

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As a woman reflected on her childhood, she said that the one piece of advice she remembers from her mother was that she always said, "When you're in a hurry, take your time."

Years later, that wisdom all came back to her as she was rushing to leave home. Running late for work, she ran through the kitchen, reached into the frig, and pulled out a container of yogurt to gulp down before she left. Because she was hurrying, she wasn't careful enough about pulling out the yogurt and it fell, the plastic container splitting, spilling the contents on the floor and into her shoes. But not before she knocked over another plastic container of tapioca pudding that her husband had left on the refrigerator shelf. That container too fell, the lid popping off when it hit the floor and tapioca pudding exploded not only all over the floor and back up into the frig, there was plenty to splatter up the kitchen wall. It took her several minutes to get everything cleaned up and her shoes, she said, might never smell quite the same. Not the quick gulp of yogurt she had hoped for.

And who of us has not had a good glop of tapioca pudding sliding down our walls? We lead what is at times a frenzied life—addicted to hurry. Author Kathleen Norris wrote, "One day, when I timed an annoying computer delay and found that it constituted all of ten seconds, I had what I would call a 'monk moment,' a quick vision that told me, Pay attention—watch yourself. I had let technology and its attendant idol, efficiency, make a fool of me."

Speaking of technology, according to new research, reported by the *New York Post*, do you know that Americans check their phones on the average, once every 12 minutes, which translates to about 80 times a day. One person in ten check their phones on the average every four minutes. Four hours is about the longest that the average person is willing to go before the need to check their phone compels them to look. And it was found that the average person spends 53 minutes on Instagram per day, not including Facebook,

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Snapchat, and LinkedIn. That's a lot of fast information coming our way!

For many of us, hurry has become a way of life...a way of living. It has been called an idol because it grabs our attention and if we are not careful, it also consumes our loyalty. Idols are like that—they can begin to make us. And we are unaware of just how dangerous that can be. The best idols remain cloaked in the garment of innocent acceptability. After all, isn't it admirable to be efficient? Isn't it all about getting a lot done? Don't we want to do things as quickly as possible? By these criteria, hurry may be seen as one of our culture's most dangerous and pernicious idols.

Listen to some everyday expressions that subliminally invite hurry into our lives:

- Speedy recovery
- Hurry up
- Mad dash
- Get a move on
- ASAP
- The sooner, the better
- Step on it
- Shake a leg
- Get cracking
- I've got to run
- I don't have much time
- Wait a minute
- Just a second
- Right away
- How soon can I expect it
- Running late
- Running scared
- Running out of time
- Run down
- On the run
- Grab a bite
- Fast food
- It'll only take a minute
- On the double
- Move it or lose it

And there are a multitude of other words or phrases that start with instant, fast and express. Just listen some time. Perhaps we've even been conditioned from an early age! *Run, Dick. Run, run, run. Run and see.* And Jane did a lot of running, too, as I recall.

Consider this: information is coming at us fast, incredibly faster than ever before. We know in minutes, maybe even seconds, what generations before us could not even imagine. It is thought that a single edition of the *New York Times*, contains more information than someone living in the 17th century would have encountered in an entire lifetime.

Many of us experience what has been named Hurry Sickness. It is a behavior pattern characterized by continual rushing and anxiousness—an overwhelming and continual sense of urgency. One psychologist writes that in our uber-fast, uber-techno world, we are experiencing an epidemic of hurry sickness.

He continues, we can try to sustain living at breakneck speed but sooner or later, physically, mentally and/or emotionally we fall apart. Our bodies—and minds—weren't meant to endure the continual stress of hurrying. Blood pressure spikes, hearts wear out, at the least we become irritable and easily angered, and we get upset—from frustration and exhaustion. One wise seminary professor warned us that if we don't carefully and intentionally slow ourselves, our bodies will do it for us.

This Lent, as we consider growing in God, as we think about practices and disciplines, we consider, why slow?

- Slowing allows space and time for God and for growing in God. Even the disciples, at Jesus invitation, got away from it all and left the busyness behind for a time.

In Mark 6, we read...

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

Jesus knew the importance of slowing and he modeled it for his friends.

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- With slowing, we find we have more patience—we're not constantly rushing to the next thing.
- Slowing helps us to live the present moment to its fullest, not missing the blessings that are ours if we slow enough to notice.
- Slowing helps us to trust God's unhurried time schedule—that Kairos that nourishes our souls.
- In slowing we find freedom from addiction to cell phones, email, messaging, and all that speeds up the pace of everyday living.
- As we slow, we are living the truth that love, being fully present to others, and hurry are fundamentally incompatible.
- Slowing enables us the space to receive interruptions graciously.
- When we slow, we are realizing that the fruit of the spirit is not an instant work. We are a work in progress.

In a workshop on hurry, a participant made this confession: "I agree with everything everyone is saying about hurry. I know that I'm hurting myself. I feel the pain. I just feel like I don't know how to stop." Maybe we can identify with that. Maybe we ran by our frig just this morning and grabbed a yogurt to gulp down quickly.

What are some ways that we can disengage from the busyness and slow our hurry? How can we live life at a speed that allows for thinking more deeply, listening more carefully and seeing more clearly? It has been suggested that rather than use the negative term, slow down, we make it positive—how can we "savor" the moment?

The psalmist invites "O Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who trust in God." As we taste and see, we savor—it's not just **not** being in a hurry, it's savoring. To savor is to taste or smell with pleasure, to relish, to delight in, to enjoy. The word has its origin in the Latin word *sapere*, which

means “taste” and “be wise.” This connection has never been more important.

The pace of savoring, of tasting, is more than negating or minimizing hurry, it implies noticing and paying attention, internalizing—there is more than meets the eye! And perhaps it is there that we find God.

There are some deliberate techniques that intentionally provide relief from frantic activity and the compulsion to hurry, that can help us to develop the Art of Slowing.

- Did you know that this past Friday was National Day of Unplugging? I don't know who decides or declares these days, but this one is a keeper! It's the first Friday in March. 24 hours, sun-up to sun-down—a time to remember to unplug, unwind, and relax.
- If you haven't filled out the survey yet that is included in this morning's bulletin, complete it, and then look and see which responses you wish were different. Develop one or two modifications in your behavior that will produce different results if you retake this test a month down the road.
- Drive in the slow lane. Better yet, get in the longest line at the grocery store and don't count the things in the person's cart ahead of you or watch the check-out person, trying to help them to be more efficient by staring at them.
- Get enough rest.
- Speak more slowly, like Pastor Greg did so beautifully during the prayer.
- Look people in the eye.
- Chew slowly, cherishing the gift of good food—savor it!
- Sit long at the table—a lot happens around the dinner table when we make space and time.
- Insert down time between meetings, appointments—don't back-to-back-to-back.

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- Count your blessings, before you even lift your head off the pillow in the morning, remembering to name three things for which you are thankful.
- Remember to breathe! / Breathe deeply / and breathe long!

Each week we have designed a time during the service to try a new practice or discipline. This morning we want to slow—to disengage from the busyness around us. I invite you to get comfortable, rest your hands in your lap. We're going to view about two minutes of a video that captures a the beauty of God's creation. There's some relaxing music. Feel free to watch the video, or if you'd rather, close your eyes, listen to the music. Whatever helps you to best slow. Continue to notice your breathing—deep and intentional. Imagine that you are breathing in Christ's presence and breathing out anxiety, fear, and hurriedness.

Many of you know that just six weeks ago, our nephew Jonathan and his wife, Ashley lost Scarlett, their almost one-year-old, when they found her unresponsive after a short nap. It's been incredibly difficult for Scarlett's parents, grandparents and for all of our family. Recently Ashley posted this wisdom on Facebook: "In Scarlett's honor please take a moment and slow down, love your kids, read them one more story before bedtime, go for a walk or bike ride, laugh so hard you cry with them. Life is just too short to not take in these precious moments."

What do we risk losing when we hurry? The present moment is the only moment we ever have to live. It is here and it will never come again. Life is too precious to miss and the faster that we go, the more likely we are to overlook what really matters. So let's remember this Lent. Breathe. Breathe deeply...God is here and now.

