

**Sermon: A Go-Slow Advent****Scripture: Matthew 24****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: November 30, 2025**

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There was a woman who just a few days before Christmas suddenly realized that amidst all that she was trying to manage, she had forgotten to send out her annual Christmas card. Without a moment's hesitation she quickly made a list of who she wanted to send them to and ran out the door to the nearest store. She hustled through the crowded aisles to where the greeting cards were and grabbed a few packages with a lovely scene of the Bethlehem stable and hurried to the check-out line. She raced home and addressed and stamped each envelope. She just didn't have it in her to write notes in each card so she sealed them up and ran off to drop them in the mailbox. With just a few minutes left before the family descended on the house, she plopped herself down in her chair with a big sigh of relief and absent-mindedly grabbed one of the extra cards, realizing with a chuckle to herself that she hadn't taken the time to even read the sentiment on the inside... she opened it and her eyes went wide in shock as she read: "This note is just to say... a little gift is on its way!"

As we enter into the 4 weeks of Advent in preparation for Christmas, an important spiritual practice for these days is to find even momentary opportunities to *slow down*. Can you imagine if someone asked you "how's it going this holiday season" and you said "It's going nice and slow." How shocking would that be? "It's just a slow, calm pace, you know, giving me enough time to breathe and really take in what's around me." "What is *wrong* with you?" might be the response. Slow? We do not see slow as a

virtue in our culture, but the truth of the matter is that our spirits thrive on slow.

Our middle daughter Naomi when she was young was glum after school one day because she was beaten in a race by a friend of hers. Tracy asked her what was wrong and Naomi said with squinted eyes “I think Emma stole my fast”. I think we could all use a few thieves around us “stealing our fast” these days because there are ways that our souls need slow that fast cannot provide and Advent is as good a time as any to work on our pacing of things, to do them maybe just a little slower than we feel like might be a good idea... otherwise, like that woman sending her cards, our hurry can back-fire on us. It was Thoreau who said - “I have no time to be in a hurry!”

So of course one of the benefits of going slower is simply that we’ll notice more. For one thing we’ll notice our own emotional state better - wow, I am anxious. I am on edge. I am sad. I am at peace right now. And truthfully, everyone is better off when we are more conscious and aware of our emotional states. Then there’s enough time to make choices about how our emotional state determines or doesn’t determine our actions. When we are walking and someone steps in front of us it’s a whole different thing than when we are driving and the same thing happens.

Taking our time is a good phrase. Let us take our time. When we take our time and allow for others to take theirs, we’re also more apt to notice the “easter eggs” so to speak or surprises hidden in our day to day lives that are there to bless us along the way. So much to bless us with a sense of mystery or God’s presence or some deeper meaning that we can so easily miss. I was walking in the Fells a few days ago at dusk and no one

else was around when I came upon a large buck. It lifted its antlered head and I stopped and for a few moments we stared at each other.

Still.

In those quiet darkening woods.

How often do we get to look at a wild animal in the eyes? Lao Tsu is quoted as saying “Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.” My chattering mind that was going to town as I was walking along - *I need to do this and I could do that and what about this other thing and I wonder what he meant by that and what happened in DC and what is happening in our world and how are we going to get there and do that and when* - was suddenly stilled to an emptiness - that felt so good to my brain, my heart, my soul. Needless to say, the moment required me walking, not running or biking, much less driving the car.

Isaiah invites us in our scripture this morning to “walk in the light of God”. It’s a different sentiment than that song that I love based on that same verse which goes “we are marching in the light of God”. I would have missed my deer friend in those woods, had I been marching. There’s a pace and openness that is required by walking, especially if you can take the time to walk without purpose. When we walk for walking’s sake we can be open to detours and distractions and pauses and encounters that have nothing to do with our designs and our intent and our desires but are just there, gifts for the receiving. We SO prize in our culture being self-directed, self-made people. Slowing down helps us remember that for the most part we are not. We are not self-made and hardly self-directed. We are God-made and ideally we are God-directed as we walk in the light of God.

Going slow and allowing our fast to be stolen from us for at least a time, gives time for God to catch up with us and all our worries. And we will

be amazed at times at how our problems are settled by waiting and watching instead of initiating and acting and trying to solve it all on our own. Just a breath or a pause. Imagine taking that problem you're struggling with and just give it some time, give God some time with it? It's one of the most important things about a vital prayer life - giving God time. We can be impatient at times "God didn't answer my prayer!" But did we give him even a minute? I've wondered how often our prayers are answered later down the road when we've forgotten that we had even prayed for it. We think it just naturally unfolded that way but in fact God answered a prayer we forgot we had even prayed. Can we slow down that knee-jerk response to having it all fixed right now? Sometimes having it fixed and solved now is not in our best interest.

It was St Augustine who loved the latin phrase "ambulando solvitur" which means "it is solved by walking." Have you had that experience of coming to realize something while you're out walking with no other purpose in mind? You finally let it go and go out for a walk and then it comes to you. Showers and walks, the two most common places for God to inspire us. Both require slowing down and it gives God time to work with us, for us.

In that vein of noticing things more and giving God a minute that slowing down allows for, going slower also helps us to recognize and realize when God's Holy Spirit has put something on our hearts that we need to hear or respond to, something that we should do or say or maybe shouldn't do or shouldn't say for that matter. How often does someone far from you come to mind and how often do you reach out to them simply because they popped into your mind out of nowhere? And have you ever done that and found that the person really needed that connection? Or you realize how much you needed it? That's how the Holy Spirit works. But it

often requires going at a slow enough pace to take the Holy Spirit up on Her invitation. Our gospel passage from Matthew this morning speaks of “staying awake because we do not know when the Lord will come” and the Lord comes in many many ways. Our fast, even brutal pace at times has the effect of putting us to sleep to so much of what we need to stay awake to. As one of my favorite bumper stickers says “Be Alert. The world needs more Lerts.”

The world really does need more Lerts, more people who are attentive and care-full, full of care. We do not know when the Lord will come and sometimes he comes in the guise of a stranger in a place we'd least expect at a time that is simply not convenient for how we've structured our lives and yet that's how God comes. Why do I say that? Because it's how God came at Christmas. Advent is a time of preparing for the Lord's coming, surprisingly, unexpectedly, at times when and in places where we're not even looking, requiring us to wake up, pay attention for God's sake, for our sake, for the world's sake.

So in review here are 4 ideas for you to try in the coming 4 weeks leading up to Christmas.

1. Try intentionally slowing down as a discipline this Advent. When you notice yourself rushing or panicking to get stuff done and you feel like there's just not enough time in the day, do the opposite of what you think. Don't go faster, go slower, even for a moment, take a few breaths, slow the pace (unless you're crossing the street).
2. When someone comes to mind this Advent, let them know with a text or a note or a call. It could be a stranger encounter too. It

might be that God has intentionally put you in their way and put them on your heart. Take your time to respond.

3. If you've got a problem that needs to be settled, practice patience to give God a minute. Give God some time to work on it in you and with you and for you. God loves you and God wants your best. Can you believe that and trust that enough to hand your worries to God?
4. And finally, take some walks, longer than you are used to, slower than you are used to, more disconnected from technology than you are used to. Just walk away. Make your family wonder where you are, like Ellen DeGeneres who said - "My grandmother started walking five miles a day when she was 60. She's 97 now and we don't know where the heck she is!"

4 Advent disciplines - Take walks, give God some time with your struggles, note those who come to mind and cross your path, and generally go slower, especially when you feel you need to go faster.

If she took a little more time in her chair, maybe it dawned on that woman reading her greeting cards that the sentiment was actually perfect - "this note is just to say a little gift is on its way" - that really nothing more needed to be done. A little gift IS on the way. A small, quiet, intimate gift given out of love by God for the sake of the world in the form of a baby to be born at Christmas. Amen.