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First Presbyterian Church of Greenville, MS

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Title: *The Pause Button*

Texts: *Psalm 46; Mark 14:12-26*

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
'Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.'
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, 'Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.' So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, 'Surely, not I?' He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.'

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

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Mark 14:12-26

This week I was at the Delta Grind and I saw the owner, Joni, sitting out front. It was one of those beautiful Delta fall days (like the one we're having today) and I said to Joni: "Isn't the weather great?" She said: "Yes, it is! It just makes you want to hit the pause button." I looked at Joni and I said: "Now that'll preach!" (It really spoke to my heart when she said this. I wonder if it speaks to yours.)

Isn't it true that there are moments in life... moments that you just want to hold on to... and it is so difficult to let the moment go... moments that you just want to hit the pause button?

I remember there are moments that I've watched a movie... or a show on TV... and I have to hit pause on the DVR... and I think... "Now that is real! True to life! Let me absorb that for a minute!"

There have been times in the life of this church... moments when our church choir sang a beautiful anthem... and when it was over... I didn't want to let the moment go.

I like what Kendall shared in her testimony last week and her hike with some of her friends in the Eastern Highlands. She said: "I remember us hiking the way up—*we'd pause when we'd get out of breath* and turn around and say, 'Would you look at that view?'" There were lots of waterfalls. We hadn't been there before so we weren't familiar with the area. We'd be hiking and hiking and then we'd come to a waterfall. The cold water felt great! We swam in every single one. Such a welcomed sight and each one was a surprise."

It was a joy for me last Sunday when Kendall, Guy and Ed got up to share their journey of faith. I looked out on the congregation and I saw everyone beaming... just smiling from ear to ear. There were some great moments in that worship service. There were moments that I just wanted to hit the pause button to reflect... and to carry something about those moments with me on into the future.

During the children's sermon, Murphy shared his experience of taking communion for the first time with his grandson. Murphy, you shared how the experience deepened your understanding of Communion... and how God ministers to us through all of our senses as we partake in the sacrament. I would imagine that was a moment, Murphy... that, if you could, you may have wanted to hit the pause button... and to live in that moment just a little longer... to embrace the joy relationship with the Holy Spirit and God's good creation!

When we hear the gospel lesson this morning, it is interesting for us to note that: *The author of the Gospel of Mark was in a hurry when he wrote his gospel.* He wrote down the words on the page as fast as his hands would let him. Mark is the first of the four gospels that was written, so I would imagine he was aware of how this controversial, counter-cultural story was about to turn the world on its head.

I think the rush-paced narrative style of Mark must have had an influence on postmodern American writers like Henry Miller, Earnest Hemmingway and Jack Kerouac. The mindset being: *Just get the words on the page... and let the story tell itself.* "No time for poetry, but exactly what is."¹ The writer and poet Allen Ginsberg tells the story that fellow writer and artist Jack Kerouac would tape together reams of paper together into scroll because he believed that "if you take time to change your paper in the typewriter, you're likely to miss a thought or revelation." This was innovative for a

¹ *Belief and Technique of Modern Prose.* Jack Kerouac.

writing-style for the 1940s and 50s, but I don't think it would have seemed that innovative to the writer of Mark. The gospel of Mark was not written at time when styles were branded or marketed the way they are today; the style of the gospel of Mark was simply what it was. Due to the political turmoil of the early Christian church, the words of the gospel had to be written quickly because a person could be executed for communicating... and proclaiming... such a message that challenged political power and authority.

What is striking when reading Mark – the author is rushed, but it is clear that Jesus is not (rushed). *You get the feeling that Jesus was never in a hurry, but he was always on time.*² Jesus' gestures and his teaching are centering and methodical. He models to us competence... and one who has cultivated a strong inner-authority. As the story unfolds, Jesus conducts rituals... sacraments... he tells stories... sometimes he offers advice... and not even the restless and rushed author of Mark can help but slow down, even if for but a moment. The Lord's Supper is one of those occasions that helps us to slow down... to pause... to be still and recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I think Jesus loves the fact that here in the Delta things move a little slower. Our culture is known for a slower pace of life than the rest of the country, but – even then – most of us are well aware that that is true for all of us. For many of us, things are not slow at all... and maybe the slow ones are getting in the way!

I must confess – I'm one of the ones that could learn to slow down. Let me share with you one story that might be relevant...

In San Francisco, I was introduced to an ancient spiritual tool called “The Labyrinth.” Labyrinths have long been used as meditation and prayer tools. Visually, it combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. The labyrinth represents a journey to our own center and back again out into the world. One misconception people have: *A labyrinth is not a maze.* A labyrinth has only one path. It is unicursal. The way in is the way out. There are no blind alleys. The path leads you on a circuitous route to the center and out again.³ Well – one day I told my supervisor that I wasn't getting anything out of the labyrinth and that maybe it isn't for me. He made a suggestion to me in a very non-accusatory way: Why don't you run the labyrinth? If you're used to going 100 miles an hour, why don't you try and go 80! So, guess what? I ran the labyrinth... and I thought maybe I got a little more out of it than I did before. Then, I jogged it. A few weeks later, I moved to a brisk walk. Then, before I knew it, I started to walk the labyrinth at varying speeds... and I discovered I

² Insight from Ernest Campbell.

³ The description of The Labyrinth comes from Dr. Daniel H. Johnston's *Lessons for Living*.

was appreciating more moments of pause in my life... that were grounding me deeper in a relationship with God.

Sometimes I think that we just like to keep ourselves busy. But I think doing God's work requires more than just keeping busy. My Dad shared with me a great prayer that I once used for a Prayer of Invocation at a community gathering of businesses here in Greenville: "O God, bless our businesses, but not our busy-ness."

In the working world these days, one of the most frequently asked questions at job interviews is: "Can you multitask?" It's not a bad question. In fact, I think it's a very good question, but – on the other hand – I wonder: "Spiritually speaking, is 'multitasking' the ideal model?"⁴

Don't you think that perhaps there also might be value in knowing how to pause... to stop... and center ourselves on God?

Yet – we all know that this can be taken too far. Eventually – we have to unpause the moment... and we need to go on with our lives. It is not good for any one of us to live in the past... or live in any one moment for too long. At some point – the movie ends, we close the Bible after our scripture reading, we hear a benediction... and we go out into the world.

But the thing we need to be aware: *In those moments of pause, we bring with us something that has the capacity to transform us, something that can change us to be a more faithful, loving and just people.*

I love how Psalm 46 repeats one particular phrase:

The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

In this Psalm of stillness and pause, the psalmist holds a deep knowledge of the presence of God. Also, the psalmist brings a knowledge of what God has done.

"God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble..."

"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁴ Insight from Clifford J. Hayes

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved...”

“He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.”

These are simple phrases that reveal the work of our Loving God.

Just like the psalmist, if we pause... we allow a chance for God to speak to us. When we pause, God will speak to us through our senses. We will become aware and we will remember our history. As people of faith, we will remember how God spoke to communities through the prophets in scripture... and how God continues to be alive, transforming our lives and communities today.

And so, let it be our prayer this World Communion Sunday:

O God, help us to be still and to know that you are God. And God, in the breaking of bread, may we hear the song of the universe. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.