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2020...Can you believe it? A few decades ago, the year 2020 seemed like such a distant place in the future, almost with a kind of science fiction aura, and it was hard to imagine what life would be like when reaching the year. But here we are. In the future. 2020.

I remember back in the 1990s when Dick Hamm, our former General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), offered our Disciples church a 2020 vision. He challenged us to start 1000 new churches and revitalize 1000 existing churches by 2020. Our current GMP Terri Hord Owens reflected on that challenge this past August and commented, "While not every [church] start continued, we have more than 60 percent who did. But another effect of those planting operations was to work new church ministry into our DNA, to make the planting embedded in who we are today."<sup>1</sup>

Planting new churches is not something that happens overnight, for it takes many years of planning and waiting for the seeds of a new church to grow, and waiting is not something most of us particularly like to do.

Waiting was not something the Gospel writer Mark seemed to enjoy either, for as he wrote about his experiences with Jesus, his story always seems in a hurry. He doesn't begin telling about the birth of Jesus—no long trip to Bethlehem to find no room in the inn, no shepherds standing in the fields watching their flocks, no wise men traveling for two years to find the child. Matthew and Luke tell those stories, beginning gradually and working their way toward Jesus' ministry. But Mark jumps right in with John the Baptizer calling people to repent of their sins and be baptized.

Then immediately, Mark says, Jesus was baptized, then immediately once again Jesus was led into the wilderness where he encountered temptations. Throughout the rest of his gospel, Mark uses the small Greek word εὐθύς (euthus) 42 times, a word meaning immediately, right away. Nowhere else in the Bible does one writer use this word so often.

Why such a hurry, Mark? Reading the book of Mark makes me think of all the times I've been in a hurry. Sometimes in those hurried times I miss what's happening around me. Have you ever been in such a hurry that you missed something?

In today's fast-paced society, we're flooded with so much information that sometimes it's hard to slow down and absorb all the details. Some internet readers experience this issue as they post the abbreviation TLDR when making comments in response to online articles. The letters stand for "Too Long, Didn't Read." We seem to like bite-size tidbits of information. Don't make us read too much or think. Keep it simple, 'cause we're in a hurry.

Mark seems to reflect this hurried pace in his writing, for he gets to the point very quickly. Not a lot of fluff in his story. Concise. Short. To the point. Maybe written for those of us who want the condensed version of Jesus' story, for Mark's 16 chapters are much shorter than the other three gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John.

In Mark's story, as soon as Jesus gets baptized, he invites some disciples to follow him, and immediately they left what they were doing to join him. Before we even have a chance to catch our breath, Jesus is faced with many people who need healing, beginning with a man possessed with an unclean spirit. Quickly we encounter Simon Peter's mother-in-law, who has a

fever and was healed. Soon the whole town gathered at her house to be healed.

The next morning Jesus tried to get away for some quiet rest and prayer, but that didn't last long, for the disciples indicated there were many people seeking to be healed—a man with a skin disease among them. The pace seems to quicken with each healing, moving faster and faster, until Jesus finally told the one healed from the skin disease, "Don't tell anyone what happened here." Yeah, like that's gonna work, Jesus! The guy who was healed began telling everyone, and so Jesus had to leave town and head into the countryside, though everyone still managed to find him even there.

How might we respond to Jesus' amazing ability to offer healing if we encounter him today? Two men out fishing had an unusual encounter and had to decide that very question.

It was a beautiful morning—seventy-eight degrees and sunny with a light breeze—and the fish were biting... One fisherman noticed a man walking on the shore. He could not believe his eyes. He said to his friend, "If I did not know any better, I'd say that was Jesus over there."

The man on the shore waved them in. They rowed to the shore, and indeed it was Jesus. They began talking with him, and one man asked him if he really could heal sick people.

Jesus said, “Yes, of course, I’m good at that.”

The man then asked him to heal some chronic physical problems he had. Jesus touched the affected areas, and one by one each place was restored to healthy functioning. The man never felt better. He was more alive than he had ever felt and had a renewal of youthful energy.

Jesus then looked at the other fisherman.

The man’s eyes got wide, and he said, “Don’t you come near me. I’m on 100 percent disability [income].”<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes we may resist healing, offering excuses or feeling in too much of a hurry to slow down and wait for healing, rushing from one thing to another. Getting the kids to school or sports practice or a music rehearsal. Getting to the doctor’s office, trips that seem to increase in frequency with age. Getting to the store for groceries for supper. Getting to work on time. Even having to find a way to get to church in the morning. So many things to do. Hurry... hurry...hurry.

Or we may have days when we feel a bit like Jesus, everyone wanting us to offer them help or healing. We may feel it’s difficult enough to care for ourselves, let

alone offer healing to others. And I think that’s where Mark offers us a clue: for in the midst of Jesus’ fast pace, he always seemed to find time to get away for prayer, a bit of space to recharge. As one writer commented:

Jesus’ ministry in Mark was a whirlwind of activity—an explosion of fame and rumor. But even in the middle of it, Jesus withdrew to pray. Jesus knew he could not continue at this pace without that time and attention to God.

Why do we think we can do more with less? Jesus needed to recharge, and he needed to connect with God. We need at least as much. What might it look like if we took the time to recharge and spend some time alone with God?<sup>3</sup>

Maybe Mark is offering us a clue for our own lives. As he writes of the fast pace of Jesus’ ministry, Mark’s story amazingly connects to our fast pace thousands of years later. Throughout the ages since Jesus, church folks have wondered how to create silent spaces to connect to God.

Íñigo López was one of those people who struggled to discern how to connect to God. Born in 1491, he grew up in the small village of Loyola in Spain. As a young adult, he served in the military until a

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cannonball shattered his leg, resulting in surgery in a day without anesthetics. While recovering from surgery, he began reading in the hospital scripture and devotional materials about the saints, resulting in religious experiences and his exploration of methods of meditation and prayer. After his release from the hospital, he decided to study theology.

We know him today by the name St. Ignatius of Loyola who founded the Society of Jesus, aka Jesuits, and wrote a book outlining Spiritual Exercises, a series of prayers and meditations to practice as a way to connect to God.

Of all the many spiritual practices outlined in his method, he said that the most important one was the Examination of Conscience, also called the Daily Examen. If you could offer only one prayer a day, this was the one he emphasized. It's a spiritual practice for

the end of the day, as a way of reviewing your day and noticing God's presence.

Begin by first remembering that God has been present throughout your day, and then recall something that happened for which to give thanks. Notice where God had been involved in your life—a conversation with a friend, the beautiful weather while taking a walk, a surprising phone call that offered hope. Recall anything you regret or something you did against someone, and ask for forgiveness. Close by remembering God's grace for another day.<sup>4</sup>

The Examen invites you to ponder, "Where did I notice God today?" and then to give thanks for God's movement in your life. The Examen may be an ancient practice for us to reclaim and try. It's a way to slow down...pause. What a wonderful way to seek healing in the New Year.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://disciples.org/from-the-gmp/general-minister-and-president-reflects-on-general-assembly/>

<sup>2</sup> Hodgin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 2932-2942). Zondervan. #419.

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<sup>3</sup> Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources, Program 1 2019-2020, © 2019 Clergy Stuff.

<sup>4</sup> [https://jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/The\\_Daily\\_Examen.pdf](https://jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/The_Daily_Examen.pdf)