

Trinity XV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

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Do not be anxious.

Quite often, when I am driving and I turn my head to check for traffic coming from the right, I am surprised by what I see. For there before my eyes, appears not an oncoming car or a clear road, but the back of my wife's head. I should not pick on Kathy for this, because I often try to find a brake pedal when I'm in the passenger seat. We call this kind of behaviour, along with the cries of "Watch out! How fast are you going?" and the like, backseat driving. Honestly, it is often justified, and I have been spared several disasters by the unwelcome advice and intervention of backseat drivers. The issue with backseat drivers is trust, and what causes the offence and the friction, is that their actions and words reveal an undeniable lack of trust. None of us likes to be second-guessed.

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Well, when it comes to our journey with the Lord, many of us are exactly that, backseat drivers. It is true that we have at least given him the wheel, allowed the Lord to set the direction in our lives, but we are backseat drivers, not yet fully trusting him. Our anxiety, and even at times our anxious prayers, are a kind of spiritual backseat driving.

Three times Jesus tells us, “Do not be anxious.” It can all sound like the lyrics to that painfully peppy song, “Don’t worry, be happy.” I know that your worries and anxieties are real. Sometimes we do get concerned about stupid details, like spilled milk, burned toast, a dent in the car, or being late for a movie. But all of us here do have real anxieties, like waiting for medical tests to come back, concerns about our children’s welfare, fear about our job and livelihood, and some of them do really belong to today.

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Jesus is not telling us, though, that our problems and concerns are not real. It is not that we do not really need food or drink or clothing. So let me first say, that everyone here has reason enough to be anxious and worried. One way of managing our anxieties is to let go of the details, but Jesus corrects our anxiety even over essentials. So we must go even deeper. And while we do fret over things too far off, while we do sweat the little stuff, focusing on today's necessities can still leave us anxious. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day. You have sufficient cause to worry every day.

At times, we can remember what is important, and our anxiety over so many unimportant things is put in perspective. And we would all do well to leave tomorrow in God's hands. George MacDonald advises, "It has been well said that no man ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when tomorrow's burden is added to the burden of today that the weight is more than a man can bear.

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Never load yourselves so, my friends. If you find yourselves so loaded, at least remember this: it is your own doing, not God's. He begs you to leave the future to Him and mind the present.”

So at the outset, Jesus addresses what we are anxious about, and lastly he counsels against anxiety about the future. But in the middle of that Gospel, the reproof of anxiety comes in a simple blanket statement, “Therefore, do not be anxious.”

The first point is that you do have reason to be anxious, and many of your fears and concerns are real. But the second point is that you also have even more reason not to be anxious.

1. “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? “

Our anxieties are the fruit of a narrow-minded worldliness. Jesus would have us think of our own souls, and to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

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2. Your heavenly Father cares for you and values you. 1 Peter 5.7 says, “Cast all your anxieties upon him, for he cares about you.”

There is someone bigger than all our troubles and worries, who can still the storms of this world, and of our life, and of our souls and hearts and minds.

3. Anxiety is counter-productive. By being anxious, we do not extend our lives, but rather shorten them in so many ways. We cannot worry the gray hairs away, but we can surely worry them onto our heads.

4. The greater our anxiety, the smaller our faith. These two are opposites and enemies. The Gospel is an invitation to put our faith in God our heavenly Father, to cast our care upon him who really does care for us.

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5. Our anxieties reveal disordered priorities. Rather, we should seek God's kingdom and righteousness, and all the other things will be taken care of.

So then, there is only one thing to be anxious about: how shall we come to God's kingdom, and how can we sinners ever attain to God's righteousness? And here, above all else, we have no reason to be anxious, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. In the cross and death of Jesus Christ our Saviour, we know the care, and love, and generosity, and good will of our heavenly Father.

Jesus began speaking to us about divided loyalties: "No one can serve two masters." But the root problem, if our service is divided, is a heart not yet single in its trust. This is a common problem. Elijah faced it in the strange religious mix of his day and challenged people, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?"

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If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” Just so, Joshua demanded a clear decision from the people of God in his time: “Choose this day whom you will serve.” And so Paul faces the same issue in Galatia and the Church there: “Where do you place your undivided trust? Is it in your family pedigree, your own religious observances, and your achievements?” He adds this footnote to his letter, personally handwritten in large print for emphasis: “Far be it from me to glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are invited here today to place our trust in the cross. The opposite of anxiety is faith, and the antidote to anxiety is to exercise our faith. In the Sermon on the Mount, earlier in Matthew chapter six, Jesus gives us three such exercises. Instead of worrying about what we shall eat, he tells us to fast. Instead of the love and service of Mammon, he tells us to give our money away. And instead of all

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this anxiety, he invites us to pray to our Father, who knows what we need before we ask.

Pray more and worry less. The choice we often face is to worry or to pray, and they are two completely different reactions to the challenges and struggles of life. “In nothing be anxious but in everything be in prayer,” Paul tells us, and the peace of God will fill and rule and our hearts and minds. And it is in the Lord’s Prayer, that we learn to seek God’s kingdom first and last, the kingdom we pray to come, the kingdom which we acknowledge is his. And we learn to trust him for the provision of our bread, our needs day by day by day.

Consider the birds, consider the lilies and know the goodness of God our Creator. And finally, consider the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore do not be anxious, but rest and trust and rejoice

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and glory in the goodness of our God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.