

“Do Not Be Anxious”

Liturgical Date: Proper 14 (C)

Primary Text: St. Luke 12:22-34

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, is the Gospel Lesson from St. Luke 12. In this text, Jesus teaches about something that afflicts many people: anxiety. Jesus’ message is clear in that we need to avoid being anxious, why we should avoid it, and He gives the solution to it. Thus, the title of the sermon is “Do Not Be Anxious”.

The dictionary defines anxiety as, *“distress or uneasiness of mind caused by apprehension of danger or misfortune.”* In layman’s terms we could just say it is “stress and worry” about something or a variety of things. Probably just about everyone experiences anxiety over something at some point. And for many people it can be a regular occurrence. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 19% of Americans experienced anxiety disorder in the past year and 31% will experience it during their lifetime. So, I believe it would be safe to say that of those hearing my voice, you have all be anxious about something at some point and for a good number of you it has been a recurring issue.

Does the Bible have anything to say about anxiety? Can God’s Word help us overcome it? Yes. The Bible speaks about anxiety and in our text today, Jesus very directly addresses it. When the Bible speaks of anxiety it is speaking of “worry, dread, or fear.” In addition to our text from Luke 12, Jesus has a very similar teaching during the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew 6. The Greek word that is translated to English as anxiety in the ESV and most other modern

translations is *me merimnao*. The King James translates this as “take no thought”. Essentially, the Bible teaches us not to be consumed with the cares of everyday life. Anxiety is something to be avoided, it is an effect of the fall into sin.

Anxiety is a problem for several reasons. First of all, it is bad for you physically. Thus, medicine is concerned with anxiety. Anxiety wears on you. Not only psychologically, but physically. Jesus said in verse 25, “*And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his life span?*” And it will likely do the opposite. It can contribute to many health problems including heart problems, high blood pressure, “stress eating” that increases weight gain, lack of motivation (including to exercise), and accelerated aging, just name a few. As some of you know, I had some health challenges in past couple of years. About a year ago, I was diagnosed with high blood pressure. In consulting with my doctor, he believed one of the main issues for the troubles I was having was anxiety. As most of you are aware of, I am very busy with numerous jobs and responsibilities. My anxiety was that I felt I needed to get a certain amount of things done every day. This would eat at me and I would regularly work until 2 or 3 in the morning if I felt I was not getting those things done. As a result, my stress levels were high and this was contributing to my high blood pressure and other things. I can tell you from personal experience that anxiety is not healthy!

However, I am not a doctor nor do I play one on TV. And this being a sermon, I want to focus more on the spiritual dimensions of anxiety rather than only bringing in medical information. The second reason anxiety is a problem is that it is foolish when you think about it. As we heard in verse 25 Jesus points out that none of this worry and anxiety is going to do anything to lengthen your life. It is not going to solve any of the things that you are anxious about. When Jesus

taught on anxiety in St. Matthew 6 He said in verse 34, *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”* Worrying about what will happen in the future, is not going to solve any of those issues either. We need to trust in God, as He holds the future. Trying to solve something by being anxious about it is a fool’s errand.

We know that anxiety can be a medical condition that is diagnosed and treated. But can anxiety also be sinful? Yes. The third reason that anxiety is a problem is that it can be that we are setting our priorities on the wrong things. Verses 29-30 from our reading, *“And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.”* “All nations” in this text can be translated literally as “all pagans” or “all heathens.” What Jesus is saying here is that the worldly system teaches something very different than the way of Christ. Often times to figure out what is most important to people (our test yourself), a simple test can be applied. What is most of your effort and money being applied to? And then, more often than not, you can see what is causing you anxiety. For one person it may be something like excessive gambling or drug abuse. You can see that they try to obtain financial resources to keep those habits going. For others it may be a fancy car or big house. Or “keeping up with the Joneses”. It could be an obsession with physical beauty or social standing. People will spend a lot of time and money on lots of things that are not spiritual in nature. This is not to say that physical needs are not important, but they should not dominate the Christian’s thinking. We can expect the world to follow after these things, but Jesus calls His people to be different. When our anxiety is over things that in the end don’t matter, we sin. You can’t take it with you. Upon the

passing of someone they knew one person said to the other, “How much did he leave” and other responded, “He left it all.”

As with most sin, its roots are in idolatry. Whenever we make something more important than God, we make it an idol. We put our hope and faith in these false gods, rather than in the one true God. And this is the fourth and final reason why anxiety is a problem. And it is most important of all for eternal spiritual health. This is that anxiety is the opposite of faith. When we are anxious about the physical aspects and needs of life, we are doubting God’s provision for us. As Jesus said to close verse 28, *“O you of little faith!”*. Having faith in God is trusting God. We should trust God’s promises to provide for us both physically and spiritually. We are not to act as if our needs are greater than God’s ability to provide for them. The less trusting of God that we are, the more anxious we will become. Conversely, the more trusting of God that we become, the less anxious we will be.

We have looked at four specific reasons why being anxious is not healthy, physical nor spiritually. However, does God provide answers and solutions? Certainly (much better than the platitudes of the world-give examples). Jesus brings them forth here in our text and the Bible attests to them over and over again as the most repeated command in the Bible is to not fear, but trust God.

First of all, God has given us doctors and modern medicine as a gift from Him. If we are in the midst of anxiety, this is something that can be discussed with your doctor. As I shared earlier, this was something beneficial for me. Sometimes medications may be needed. Often times some lifestyle changes are needed. If I wanted to feel better and to be more healthy, I needed to sleep more and add in some more time for de-stressing activities like relaxing, fun activities,

and exercising. I am sure I can still make more progress (I often stopping working now at 12 or 1 instead of 2 or 3), but I have been doing better and feel much better.

While the medical aspect of dealing with anxiety is part of the solution, we cannot forget the spiritual aspect. Again, this is where Christians are to be different from the world. The world will encourage you to get medical help, “There’s got to be a pill for this, right?” While Christians avail ourselves of medicine, we know that the healing medicine of the Gospel found in the Word of God is paramount. We heard that Jesus said to not seek the things that the world says to pursue after. Then what are we to pursue? Verse 31, *“Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”* If God is our #1 priority, Jesus says that everything else we need will be provided. God promises to supply “our daily bread.” Not all the things we want, mind you, but the things that we need. And if we take an inventory, a lot of the things that we often stress about aren’t even essential anyway. The 19th Century Evangelist D.L. Moody used the illustration of a hot air balloon. A hot air balloon has bags of sand as ballast. The more of the sand that is thrown out of the hot air balloon, the higher it will rise. If we want to draw closer to the things of heaven, we must throw out the things of the world. Let sin and selfishness and doubt be cast down and set our hearts on the higher things of Christ.

Next, we must understand that God is good and desires good things for us. That may sound simple, but we must really believe that. If we truly believe that God is a good Father who desires good things for His children, then our cares begin fade. Verse 32, *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* Jesus tells His hearers that they are His “little flock.” This

affectionate term gives rise in our minds to the classic and beautiful imagery of the Good Shepherd. Jesus is our Good Shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture. Jesus will care for and protect His sheep. Earlier in the text, Our Lord gave a couple of things to illustrate this. Look at the raven, the birds, He says. They don't grow crops, they don't have barns. But you know what? God still makes sure they have food. Look at the lilies, the flowers of the field. They don't work. They don't make clothes. We could say they can't go to a store or online and buy clothes. But you know what? They are clothed more beautifully by God than even Solomon. The things that God has created are more beautiful than the things of man. When we understand that God is good and desires to care for us, our anxiety can take a back seat, our worry can melt away.

And now we look to what Jesus says toward the end of the text that is quite interesting. Verse 33 began, *"Sell your possessions, and give to the needy."* What? How is giving away some of my money and stuff going to make me feel less stressed? I am anxious because I am worried that I won't have enough, you might think. But in this, Jesus is getting to essence of the Christian life. It is one of service to God and others. We, as I said earlier, must understand that our physical possessions are not permanent. God wants us to be generous people in loving and serving our neighbor. The greater treasure is, *"a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroy."* The treasure of our hearts should be heavenly, not earthly. When we practice this, we see that much of anxiety over material and physical assets has been in error.

Finally, we come to the ultimate answer for overcoming anxiety. As we looked at earlier, the key aspect why is anxiety is harmful is it shows a lack of faith. So, the ultimate answer to not being anxious is faith. When we don't have

that faith, that rock-solid trust in God it is no wonder why many become anxious. I don't have to tell you that the Bible from cover to cover speaks about trusting God, having faith. We saw it our Old Testament Lesson today. God tells Abraham that he needs to trust Him in that He will bring about the promise of many descendants. And that reading closed with, *"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."* Our Epistle, Hebrews 11 is often called the "Faith Hall of Fame." We are given examples of how the Old Testaments saints had faith and this is what delivered them.

We too, must have faith. The bottom line, as brought out in our text from Luke 12, is that you are going to have faith in something. It is either going to be in the fleeting treasures of this world or in the eternal treasure of heaven. You know what the right answer is. Jesus not only taught these lessons, He lived them. He died and rose again that we may live. And this grace is received in faith. We cannot save ourselves from sin and hell any more than we worry our way out of anxiety. If we trust in ourselves to get everything done or if we feel that no one is in control, we err. Faith is the opposite of worry, fear, and dread. We must trust God. Do not be anxious. He provides for all that He has created, including you, the precious sheep of His flock.

Amen.