

“The Case against Anxiety”  
The Second Sunday after Pentecost  
Eunice Koch - May 25, 2008

*Isaiah 49:8-16a*

*1 Corinthians 4:1-5*

*Matthew 6:24-34*

*Psalm 131*

Some of us can relate to the Charlie Brown cartoon, You may have seen it. It shows Linus dragging his blanket as he observes to Charlie Brown, "You look kinda depressed." "I worry about school a lot," Charlie replies. Then he adds, "I worry about my worrying so much about school." As Charlie and Linus sit on a log together, Charlie makes his final observation - "My anxieties have anxieties!"

Jesus flatly says, **do not worry**. Was He serious? How can He expect us not to worry. We live in a very complex age.

A Roper Survey found that among the things that produce anxiety in Americans are: making wrong choice with major investment (Am I going to outlive my retirement savings?); having major dental work or surgery; being audited by IRS; speaking in public; getting fat; being caught in a lie by a close friend; and having a credit card declined in public. The list could go on and on.

Perhaps our anxieties do have anxieties.

But these do seem to fit into three categories; *finance, health and appearance*. -- ***Roughly the categories addressed by Jesus!***

I remember getting our first TV. As I recall, commercials were for cars and cigarettes and appliances. NOW it seems that TV commercials are a mirror of what we, as a society, worry about. There are commercials for relief from almost every imaginable medical condition.

Appearance worries are big (did you know you can buy a product that allows you to eat all you want and still lose weight? “We can’t say it on TV is it weren’t true”). You can get miracle products to grow hair or wonder products for hair removal!

Every financial type institution has commercials, --banking – investment –credit cards – mortgages – insurance. (and EVERY auto insurance company can get you a lower rate by about \$350.)

***Again the same general categories addressed by Jesus!***

And then there are the commercials for Lucinda Bassett and the Midwest Center for Stress and Anxiety –

I checked the program out on the internet because I wondered about her credentials. It appears that her only credential is that she cured herself of anxiety and is marketing her method – at a cost of approximately \$550. But one of the people critical of her program and billing methods said, “Go to the library.” So I did --via the internet. A search of the Amazon site for “anxiety” found over 10,000, and many addressing stress and anxiety experienced by children.

I also looked at the Hennepin County Library web site. There I found 54 **unique** titles dealing with anxiety, again many aimed at helping kids. A search of the Arrowhead Library system found 15; 6 stocked in Ely.

Oscar Hammerstein hit the nail on the head in “South Pacific” when he wrote, “You've got to be taught to hate and fear.” We, by our actions and attitudes, seem to be teaching our children to be anxious.

DEPRESSION – ANXIETY ATTACKS - BI-POLAR are medical conditions that should be professionally treated – not something for a self-help book.

I got several of the books and the answers seem to be the same, except Ms. Bassett’s book seem geared to sell her program. The main idea being that worry is a HABIT. The authors offer various hints on how to redirect your thoughts.

It is arrogant to suggest that, in Jesus' day, worry and stress were not everywhere, as it is today. People then had to deal with the problems of paying their bills, feeding their families, pleasing the boss, raising their children, paying their taxes - just as we do.

Jesus flatly says, **do not worry**. This was and is not a bland “pooh pooh” statement – it is an ORDER

What did Jesus say to them to help them deal with the pressures and fears of living? Well, He didn’t give them some pious platitude.

His cure was to expose the reasons why it is futile to be anxious.

We can only live one day at a time.

Don’t live in the “WHAT IFS”

If it does happen you will have worried twice.

If it doesn’t you will have worried for nothing

Does that mean that we should forget our responsibilities, -- not pay the mortgage? Not get our annual wellness checkup?

Not at all. It means that we do today what can be done today. *Period.*

We should not be anxious *because there is more to life than things or outward appearances*. Life has an eternal dimension to it that is beyond us.

I am guessing that when you heard to gospel reading and saw that your treasurer was the preacher you thought I might be talking about money.

There is something more important in the first paragraph of the reading than money. It means that a person has a limited amount of emotional, spiritual and intellectual energy and that, spending it foolishly may not leave enough for the important things.

Jesus firmly says, “**Do not worry.**”

**Was he serious?** The answer is “Yes, Jesus was and IS STILL serious.”

This **is** a command, but is also a promise and an invitation.

Our accepting this invitation can lead to LIFE

A fuller and better and more peaceful life.

And how can we do this? First, think of the serenity prayer used by many 12 step groups.

**God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.**

Next, “LET GO LET GOD” it sounds very simplistic but it contains more than a little grain of truth. Most meditation regimes stress letting go as the first step. Letting go releases us from one train of thought and often allows the blinders to fall away – maybe see the express train on the next track? Jesus reminds us that God cares for us and wants what is best for us. Many people, many of the CHRISTIANS, find this hard to believe.

Jesus gave a command. Is worry then a sin? Naming it as a sin gives us more power over it. Remember every time you renew your baptismal vows you are asked “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent, and return to the Lord?” and our response is “I will, with God’s help.”

For me, for years compulsive worrier, it is a journey – a one-step-at-a-time journey – “one small step for Eunice, not one giant leap.” It may be that way for you as well. Just try taking a first step.

I just read of the **first** part of *Reinhold Niebuhr’s* Serenity Prayer

I’d like to close by reading the **entire** prayer because the second part is also very inspiring.

Let us pray.

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;  
Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as He did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it;  
Trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;  
That I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him  
Forever in the next.  
Amen.