

“He Cares for You”

“... casting (cast) all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

As I was driving into work this/yesterday afternoon, I noticed one of those billboards that has a black background and white lettering that ends with “- God”. It’s a campaign that you might recognize that seems to try and put clever statements into God’s mouth. While the statements can be thought provoking, best construction these statements only summarize what God has already said in the Bible.

However, the truth is that sometimes they’re other people’s quotes from history to which God’s name gets added and this can be quite misleading. The quote I saw was this, “Worry is debt paid on trouble before its due.” While this quote certainly connects with our readings this weekend, it’s not from the Bible but originates in the early 1900’s as somewhat of a humorous statement for that time. Yet, this billboard will likely convince many that this is God’s Word without the actual hope God’s Word in the Bible provides on the topic of worry and anxiety.

Now as only God can do, our readings this weekend actually are God’s Word united on this very topic, the struggle with anxiety. As broken and fallen people in this world, this is a struggle that relates to us personally. All of us have things that cause us concern, worry and fear. While we might not share the same exact anxieties as each person here in this place, I’d imagine, we share more anxieties in common than we might realize or even like to admit. Certainly, I include myself in this struggle. So, the readings this weekend are especially meaningful for me, and I pray for you too, as we recognize hope in the midst of such a widespread problem in this anxiety-riddled world.

As an anchor point for us this weekend, I’d like us to hold on to a verse from 1 Peter 5:7: **“... casting (cast) all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”** It’s worth saying again and I’ll you invite to say it with me: **“... casting (cast) all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”** Whether you’re very familiar with this verse or hearing it for the first time, it’s a tremendous word from the Lord. And this word from the Lords helps us to address the who, what, when, where and why in situations filled with anxiety and also helps us prepare how we function in the midst of anxiety which our weekend readings highlight.

“... casting (cast) all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” The apostle Peter makes the ‘who’ clear. It was the original recipients of his letter hundreds of years ago, and by God’s grace this word has been passed down to us the present-day hearers. So, we should count ourselves among the ones invited to share worries and concerns to the Lord.

Now the ‘what’ might seem obvious – it’s anxieties. Yet, this ‘what’ is qualified in a very important way. It’s our anxieties, not someone else’s. It’s all our anxieties, not just the ones we think, or others think are worth the Lord’s time.

But when are we invited to share these things with the Lord? Well, Peter leaves this open-ended. He doesn’t say only on Saturdays or Sundays in worship. He doesn’t say only between the hours of 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. The implication is that this invitation stands whenever we might need it.

And perhaps the most comforting part of this verse is its answers to where and why. There is one location where we direct our anxieties and that is to the Lord. We don’t need to project our anxieties onto someone else. We don’t need to stuff our worries and fears deep down inside ourselves and then keep them covered with addictions and distractions. We don’t have to do these things because the Lord cares for us! And He cares not merely as some distant authority who barely understands, but as a dear friend and brother who truly has skin in the game.

“... casting (cast) all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” Anchored into this word of God, we can more readily engage with how we function amid anxieties that plagued us. To be clear, the Bible addresses functioning during anxiety not by only wishing that these struggles just disappear; nor is functioning equated to having every answer and solution to what worries us. In the Bible, functioning through anxiety comes by God-given faith that is led to confidently trust the Lord to do what He promises. And each of our readings this weekend, serve as a reminder of this very truth.

Consider our first reading from Genesis 15. Abram, a.k.a. Abraham, had a worry about the future that was on his heart and mind. Was he going to have a blood heir or not? The Lord had promised him a son from his own line, but nothing had changed in the present. As Abram lifted his anxiety to the Lord, Abram was heard and met by the Lord who cared for him. The Lord reassured and strengthened Abram’s faith that He would act even when

there wasn't any immediate evidence of the Lord's work. Abram's caring Lord addressed the anxiety of his future, and this same Lord continues to care to address our anxieties about our futures too.

In our reading from Hebrews 11, we're met with an amazing chapter, sometimes known as the 'Hall of Faith Chapter'. While specific people's faith is mentioned, the whole point of this chapter is to see God's strengthening and sustaining of faith in these individuals' lives. In this understanding, we can be encouraged at how God has addressed numerous other anxieties in this world.

Right away, we are reminded that by His Word, God created everything, in other words, He is in control. This is such a comfort when our lack of control in this world produces strong fear and anxiety! Or we can look at Abel and Enoch, who by God's grace, did the impossible! They pleased God, not through their own efforts but through the faith God worked in them. And this same God can and does work this same God-pleasing faith in our own lives, even right now, to counteract Satan's anxious arrow that so easily penetrates our hearts and minds causing us to worry and fret that we'll never be able to please God. In the forgiveness and righteousness of Jesus, thanks be to God, we truly do please Him.

Or think about Noah, who was called by the Lord to listen and carry out such a challenging request to build the ark, a request that went against the community and culture of his time. Imagine the anxiety that Noah and his family experienced to continue to listen to God's plan day after day when the world around him was so dismissive of God's plans and ways. But the God who cared for Noah and his family, fueled their faith to overcome their anxieties and remain connected to Him.

Then, the author of Hebrews brings up Abraham and Sarah. This time he highlights the faith the Lord gave Abraham to leave his comfort zone and live in a foreign land and the faith the Lord gave Sarah to move through her doubts of God's promise and trust that He could do the impossible. Still today, the same God who addressed Abraham's fears of the unknown and Sarah's worries about the impossible, addresses our fears and worries of the unknown and impossible with hope too.

But the greatest reminder of God's care for us during our anxieties comes in our Gospel reading where, Jesus, God in the flesh, addresses our concerns, worries and fears personally. Speaking to His disciples back then and through this Bible record of that account, now to us today, our Lord reminds us of how God provides for the ravens of the air and the lilies of the field. Yet, these creations aren't nearly as valuable to Him as we are! So, He who provides for these lesser creations will most definitely provide for you and me His most prized creations.

If these words from Jesus weren't enough to address our anxieties of being provided and cared for, Jesus followed up His words with actions. He continued to the cross, suffering through life on this sinful earth for our sake. He willingly took on the punishment we deserved and earned. So that just as He mercifully addressed the repentant criminal's anxiety of being remembered by Jesus in His kingdom, He might also mercifully address our ultimate anxiety of being provided and cared for eternally. Dying and rising for us, He made the words He speaks to us today in this Gospel reading a firm reality, **"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"** (*Luke 12:32*).

Through these words and actions of our Lord, we are led away from the anxiety of having hearts so focused on the fleeting treasures of this world. With hearts freed from this anxiety, we're able to serve as the Lord calls without concern, worry, fear or regret. We stand ready for His return because through His gift of faith, we stand prepared in His mercy, grace and love. And we live, not anxious about all the troubles, trials and temptations of this world, but eagerly anticipating His promised return.

Dear little flock of the Lord, I know that these weekend readings don't address every anxiety that you've encountered or will encounter. But these readings do remind us over and over again of the One who can and does address all our anxieties no matter what they might be. And He who has been faithful before, who knows the needs of His people, knows your needs even now and will be faithful to care for you. May God strengthen each of us in confident faith that He can and will do what He promises that we can cast all our anxieties on Him for He truly does care for us. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan