

Anxiety In the Days of Pandemic Philippians 4:6-7

How's your stress level these days? Do I have to ask? If you're anything like the average American, then it's pretty high. And no wonder. On top of the pandemic the world has been suffering through that has now taken the lives of 1,378,411 globally, with over five thousand in N.C., and our involvement in the America's longest war, and rising unemployment numbers and hundreds of businesses closing down probably forever, we have had to suffer through our nation's most embarrassing election cycle ever.

It doesn't matter if your elected official is Republican or Democrat or Libertarian or Independent, the hatred and paranoia and hypocrisy has been pouring out of Washington and Raleigh and Atlanta like sewage spewing from a burst sewer pipe. Which reminds me of an old joke that says politicians are like diapers, both need to be changed often and for the same reason.

Yesterday I googled "current anxiety levels in America" and found a report from the American Psychological Association that reports their findings from a research survey they conducted earlier this year after the pandemic had made itself at home in our nation. This is just a snippet from that article:

COVID-19 Stress Is Taking a Toll on U.S. Parents

"Many Americans are experiencing considerable stress related to the coronavirus and are also reporting higher levels of general stress than in recent years. American parents are, on average, feeling significantly higher levels of stress than adults without children. Parents report stressors related to education, basic needs, access to health care services and missing out on major milestones.

The average reported stress level for U.S. adults related to the coronavirus pandemic is 5.9. When asked to rate their stress level in general, the average reported stress for U.S. adults is 5.4. This is significantly higher than the average stress level reported in the 2019 Annual Stress in America survey, which was 4.9, and marks the first

significant increase in average reported stress since the survey began in 2007.”

If you're stressed out and anxious and worried, I want to encourage you by suggesting you and I look at all that is going on in our fallen, sick world as an opportunity. It is an opportunity for us to put into practice a commandment given to the church by the apostles Paul and Peter.

Let's begin with Paul. Take your Bible and turn to his epistle to the saints in Philippi. Philippians chapter 4 and we'll begin reading at v.6 (repeat).

⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7 NAU)

That's more than good advice, it is an imperative, a commandment, if you will, but it's a particular kind of imperative. It is telling the saints in Philippi and the saints gather at Eastway Baptist Church to stop doing something they were doing and we're doing. It is telling us to put away our anxieties every time they raise their ugly heads in our daily lives. It is the Spirit telling the saints to deal with our anxieties as soon as we realize that we're worrying.

I want to be honest with you up front, I am prone to be anxious for nothing. I like to joke about it when the Bible says, "Be anxious for nothing." I say, "Hey, I can do that. That's a commandment I have down pat. I can be anxious for nothing." But it is not a laughing matter.

When men and women and boys and girls are put on daily doses of anti-depressants because of the effects of a virus on their lives, it's pretty serious. When adults and teenagers and healthcare workers are committing suicide because of the effect a virus is having on their hearts and minds and lives and their lively hood and their futures, it's horrifically disturbing, and that is an understatement. But for those who are in Christ, **Anxiety is our opportunity to put into practice a practice that can save our lives.**

Most of us here this morning have been prescribed exercises and diets and medications that we can implement which hopefully will make us healthier, not just so we can live longer, but so we can avoid dying a miserable death. When I die, I want to die in my sleep like grampaw did. Not screaming like everybody else in the car.

This is a ‘can do’ lifestyle

Note this, beloved, since the words “be anxious for nothing” make up an imperative, it means that it can be done. We can be anxious for nothing. When we are commanded in a New Testament epistle to do something, it means it can be done, we can do the thing we’re being commanded to do. In Ephesians 5:1, we’re commanded to imitate God. And the fact that we’re being commanded to imitate God means we can do it.

Our common predicament

I and several million of my fellow earth-dwellers take meds for our anxieties and depression because life can get that bad without some killer virus. And that began for almost all of us before COVID19 began. The circumstances and consequence of COVID19 are wreaking havoc on the human psyche.

And as you all know, I’m sure, many of us experience anxieties due to a chemical imbalance in our brains. That’s why we need our meds. And I strongly recommend you take them if you have a messed-up brain as I do.

I have discovered that in spite of taking my little friend each day, Lexapro is her name, I still have my bouts with anxiety and good old fashion worry. Back in my BC days, before Christ, I tried to drown my sorrows in alcohol, and I tried to suppress them through illegal substances. I was miserable for decades and never knew the cause of my misery until I visited my doctor along with my wife back in 2000 who suggested the possibility that I am Bipolar. She was right and with the right med it has all but gone away.

I have told you before that I have a pretty serious case of PTSD that comes from a combination of parental abuse as a child and then

from my tour of duty in Vietnam. Poor Phyliss came up behind me recently after church and startled me to the bone just by touching my shoulder. I got more than a little angry and I had to ask her to forgive me. Beverly now lets me know if she is approaching me from behind or is coming into the den or any other room I may be in. I have had to apologize to her more than a few dozen times. I get really aggravated by my on-going bouts with anxiety and I have sincerely sought God to remove them from me to no avail. His grace is sufficient for me.

The source of our anxieties is irrelevant in the eyes of God.

⁶ *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything*

What is your everything? What keeps you up at night? Your children? Your grandchildren? Your financial situation? World News Tonight? The sorry state our nation has gotten itself into during this pandemic? Could it be that we are anxious because we have taken our eyes off God and put our trust and faith in our puny little government? No wonder we're popping pills in America like never before. What about some pet sin in your life? There is nothing in our lives as those who are in Christ that should put us into such a tizzy fit that we can't take it to God. The grace of God and the blood of Jesus have us covered, regardless. ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*

¹⁶ ***Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.***
(Heb. 4:15-16 NAU)

And what is grace for? Our sins and our failings and our weaknesses.

What is causing you anxiety right now?

I invite you to bring it to the altar this morning. I invite you to walk down here this morning while we sing and find grace to help in your time of need.