

**Seventh Sunday of Easter**  
May 24, 2020  
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**1 Peter 5:6-11** Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)

**"Anxiety Antidote"**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Sandra goes to check the mail. As soon as she is outside the front door she hears the voice of her adult children in her head telling her not to. Scolding her for even thinking about leaving the house for anything other than an emergency. But she's tired of waiting. When will she be able to go out? When will she be able to do simple, non-threatening things like checking the mail? When will she hear back from her granddaughter in the big city letting her know if she is safe? When will she have to stop wondering about her grandson going to work every day coming into contact with so many people who might be contagious or carriers of this deadly disease? When will she get news from her nephew letting her know how her own sister is doing? Whether she is recovering from whatever she has, whether she has tested positive or negative, how serious her condition is? When will companies start hiring again so her brother can at least start looking for work again? When will we hear some good news from the radio or television or internet stories instead of just giving us more doom and gloom predictions? When will people stop fighting over whether we need to keep sheltering or start opening up? When will they stop the constant bickering about what will cause more harm to more people in the long run?

Sandra feels anxious, worried, and concerned about a lot of things. And who can really blame her. If you aren't feeling like that some time and aren't asking yourself some of those questions, you probably aren't paying attention.

Anxiety is a reality of our lives. It is just a part of the world in which we live. The good news is God is realistic. 1 Peter helps us address some real situations that real people deal with. And not in a dismissive kind of way. Not in an overly optimistic, just think positive thoughts kind of. But not in a doom and gloom, everything is ruined and life will never be the same sort of way either. God's Word helps us deal with the real problem of anxiety. God doesn't give us a scolding for feeling anxious. He doesn't load us up with a guilty trip. But neither does God brush all our problems under a rug. God has a solution. An anxiety antidote.

God invites us to center our solutions around this word of encouragement from 1 Peter 5:7 **"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."** (NIV)

Maybe it won't surprise you that public health researchers were using terms like "pandemic" to describe the mental health issues we are facing. But it might be surprising just how early and how often mental health struggles are popping up in the population. Recent studies show that adolescent depression remained pretty flat throughout the 1970s and 80s, then actually declined from the early 1990s through the beginning of this new decade. Then over the past fifteen years, the percentage of teenagers who have

experienced a major depressive episode spiked from 8 to 13%. That means the number of severely depressed teenagers went from 2 million to 3.2 million in the span of 2007 to 2017. When you compare that to the number of suicides and attempted suicides for children even younger than that, it gives us all a wake up call.

Unfortunately, your experience probably tells you none of that is a big surprise. Anxiety is real. And God doesn't deny its existence like some moon landing denier or flat earth advocate. He just has a rather refreshing solution. There is a surprising first step Peter calls for when dealing with real life disturbances we all face. Peter says: **"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."** (1 Peter 5:6 ESV) It is a surprising solution, because we often feel like we need to be stronger to battle anxiety. We need to exert ourselves. We need to show greater resolve and grit. But it is important to understand that Peter doesn't want us cowering in fear under God's angry wrath. Peter wants us to give up our pride the causes us to puff ourselves up and pretend we are something we're not. Peter wants us to voluntarily lower ourselves and puts the needs of others before our own. In this context, it means putting our confidence in God's grace when we feel like we are under pressure.

Peter introduces something that would be unimaginable to the non-Christian culture of his time. Pagans valued strength. Being able to bend other people to your will. They had no concept of intentionally lowering yourself for the sake of someone else.

And one of the reasons why we are so often anxious is because we - without realizing it - so often think like pagans. Or at least, forget about our uniquely Christian way of looking at the world. My own internal conversations are behind so much of the anxiety that plagues my life. I feel like I have to hold onto all my concerns. I think I have to dwell on what is bothering me or it won't get addressed. I convince myself I have to obsess over my problems or the world's problems. I have to churn them around inside by brain constantly like one of those cement mixers.

Anxiety becomes dangerous because it becomes a distraction. Alone with our thoughts, consumed by our worries, we are caught unaware of the serious threats out there. Peter tells us: **"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."** (1 Peter 5:8 ESV) Maybe you have friends who are sharing flyers or YouTube videos with prophecies about how this pandemic is a sign of the end of the world. When Jesus prepares his disciples for the end times, he warns them about anxiety: **"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap."** (Luke 21:34 NIV) So rather than being suspicious about the danger of governments or non-government organizations, Jesus warns us about the dangers of having heart that are lulled into a false sense of security and not prepared for spiritual dangers. In the parable of the Sower, Jesus poses a similar warning: **"The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful."** (Matthew 13:22) Things that consume your thinking and cause you to chase after earthly comfort are the greater dangers than villainous organizations.

I'm not a medical professional, so I will admit I don't understand exactly how antidotes work. But I picture a pill I could swallow or a shot that could get injected into my arm that makes me immune to disease. Basically, a nurse gives me medicine and I can go about my life as usual. Peter gives a different kind of spiritual antidote. This one actually requires effort and attention on our part: **"Be sober-minded; be watchful."** (1 Peter 5:8) Peter again wants us to be realistic about the dangers our souls face. Instead of reacting to threats and dangers the exact same way the unbelieving world does, we need to be awake and aware. Don't get drowsy by becoming self-reliant. Don't become dull by putting confidence in yourself.

There's a difference between being "sober-minded" and paranoid, between being "watchful" and worried constantly. Confidence in God leads to readiness.

I guess I haven't watched enough nature shows to realize lions are pack hunters. They divide into two groups. There are the stalking lions and the roaring lions. The roaring lions are the ones past their hunting prime. They wouldn't be able to inflict much harm on their prey because they are too slow or have lost too many teeth. So they make a lot of noise and scare their victims right into the traps being set by the stalking lions. That is the same as our spiritual predicament. The devil can rage and make a fuss. The devil can try to scare us so we turn to false prescriptions that actually dull our spiritual senses. We can run to accumulating stuff and stockpiling achievements that will make us feel good momentarily. But the devil makes all this noise, because he knows he has already been defeated. Jesus has broken his power and defanged him.

Jesus is the antidote to your anxiety. Give your cares to Jesus because he cares for you. When you feel isolated and all alone with your fears, Jesus knows your darkest worries and deepest dreads. Jesus knows true anxiety. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus mulled over all his options. He knew what it would take to bring you peace. Your safety and peace of mind would require his anguish and agony. Jesus chose you. Jesus gave himself over to the Father's will to bring you true peace of relief from a burdened conscience, release from well-earned guilt. Jesus took on the worst-case scenario when he suffered hell on the cross. And when he cried out "**It is finished,**" he silenced every accusation the devil could ever make against you. (John 19:30) When he rose in triumph on Easter morning, he vanquished our soul's eternal foe once and for all.

Research into anxiety isn't just revealing the extent of the problem. It's actually giving us some real, concrete ways of dealing with it. A recent cover article for a major magazine reveals: "Anxiety disorders are well worth preventing, but anxiety itself is not something to be warded off. It is a universal and necessary response to stress and uncertainty...anxiety is uncomfortable but, as with most discomfort, we can learn to tolerate it." The author also gives this caution: "Far too often, we insulate our children from distress and discomfort entirely. And children who don't learn to cope with distress face a rough path to adulthood."<sup>1</sup> Peter tells us our anxiety will be temporary: "**And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.**" (1 Peter 5:10) By faith, you have the perspective of eternity. You are called to eternal glory in Christ.

God's people are realistic. We realize we aren't immune from worries, cares and concerns. Sometimes they get the best of us. But in Christ, we can be humble enough to turn to God in repentance. Humble because we know that even our greatest acts of disobedience and worst offenses of trying to shoulder all our own burdens are forgiven in Christ. And in Christ we have a mighty victor. So rather than being naive on the one hand or freezing in fear on the other hand, we can be prepared and confident. We can be watchful and at peace. We have a God who cares about us more than we realize. We have a God who invites us to unload all our baggage on him. And he gives us the peace of mind that he takes care of you. This earthly existence might be filled with lots of reasons for concern. But Jesus will return to raise you up on the last day and take you into eternal glory. His crown of victory is your perfect antidote for anxiety. Amen.

+ May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will. +

---

<sup>1</sup> Julian, Kate. "Childhood in an Anxious Age and the Crisis of Modern Parenting" The Atlantic Monthly, May 2020, print edition, p. 31. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/05/childhood-in-an-anxious-age/609079/>