

"The Cure For Anxiety"

Luke 12:22-34

August 8, 2010

11th Sunday After Pentecost

Cures are desired for many diseases – cancer, diabetes, AIDS, and so on. Suppose I could offer a cure for a major disease which, although it may not be considered as serious as some of the diseases I just mentioned, nevertheless, plagues most of us at one time or another in our lives. It can cause great stress and difficulty in our lives. I'm talking about anxiety. Wouldn't you like to be free from this? Jesus offers us a cure.

Some might object to the possibility of curing anxiety. Some would say that there is a genuine medical condition which causes "anxiety attacks" and can be controlled (but not cured) with medicine. To suggest that there is some "religious pep talk" that can cure this condition is being insensitive to people who suffer from this condition.

Some would say that it is normal to be anxious and worry. Some would say that we have every reason to be anxious and worry these days. We are still involved in a bloody war in the Mideast. We have seen the effects of severe weather – heat, tornadoes, floods, and so on – which seem to fill the headlines of our newspapers every day. We have an economy which has been stimulated by the government but appears not to be responding. People are without work and many are having trouble making ends meet. "Don't worry; be happy" as the old song goes just isn't going to cut it with such serious, anxiety-causing problems today. People would be angry and insulted if just told, "Don't worry. Everything will be okay."

When Jesus says, "Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life," we must understand exactly what he is referring to. He is not referring to a medical condition to which the medical world has attached the term "anxiety." Nor is He talking about simply a feeling of fear over not having enough or doubt whether enough will be gotten as if it were wrong to care about such things.

The word Jesus uses for “be anxious” is a bit misunderstood. In English, it only has a negative connotation. However, in Greek, the word can have a positive meaning. It can mean something like “care”. To care about our lives and the things we need is not wrong or sinful. We are not to be like the Christians in Thessalonica who didn’t have a care in the world regarding physical needs. They simply stopped working and sat around, waiting for Jesus to come again. To them, Paul had to say, “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’” (2 Thess. 3:10) So also for us – we are not to simply sit around and wait for blessing to drop from heaven. We are to work for and manage the things which God gives us.

This word only takes on a negative meaning when we care so much about our earthly life that we come to believe that we obtain the things we need for our life by our act of caring. Care becomes anxiety when we feel or believe that obtaining the things we need is in our hands. It is this attitude which Jesus condemns in our Gospel reading for today.

If you listen carefully to Jesus’ words, you see just how pointless anxiety and worrying are. To be anxious is to violate a direct command of our Lord. Therefore, it is sinful.

Being anxious is foolish. Jesus says we are not to be anxious about food, clothing, and other physical needs because “life is more than food and the body more than clothing.” In other words, there is more to life than physical needs and the satisfying of those needs. If we spend a vast amount of our attention on our physical needs, we are missing out on what is really important in life.

Being anxious is a waste of time. It doesn’t do any good. Jesus says, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” If you can’t change even the littlest thing through all of your anxiety, why be anxious about anything? It won’t help.

Being anxious shows a weakness of faith. Jesus is talking here to disciples – people like us who have faith in Christ and are a part of His family. If we were non-Christian, worrying, even if it didn’t help, might make sense to do because things are so uncertain. But Jesus directs His disciples’

attention to the ravens of the air and the lilies of the field. Neither of these creatures of God seek after their physical needs. The ravens don't sow or reap or build storehouses and barns. Yet God feeds them. The lilies do not work or make clothes. Yet God clothes them. Then Jesus draws the connection. If our Father in heaven so well takes care of these seemingly insignificant creature, won't He will better take care of those whom He has made in His own image – those for whom Christ died on the cross and rose again? Of course, He will! To think otherwise is to show a weak faith or, perhaps, a lack of faith.

But the main reason why anxiety is so pointless is that it is totally unnecessary! There is only one thing necessary and that is the Father's Kingdom – to be in relationship with Him, to experience His many blessings, and to have an eternity of perfect peace and bountiful bliss in His presence. Ultimately, that is all that is needed – all that matters.

The things of this life – food, drink, clothing, shelter – are good and necessary, but only insofar as they aid us in obtaining the Father's Kingdom and living in that kingdom. They are a means to an end. "Worrying" is when we come to believe that the things of this life are an end unto themselves. They become distractions for us in obtaining what is really necessary.

When Jesus says, "And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried," the word for "worry" there is very interesting. It mean literally to "lift something on high". We get the English word "meteor" from this Greek word. That can help understand worry. A meteor the size of a grain of sand will make such a light in the night sky that one might think that it is much greater than it really is. However, it burns up very quickly, never having any impact on the earth's surface. So it is with things that distract us from seeking the Father's Kingdom. We "lift them up" in importance and priority. They draw more attention than they deserve. They burn up very quickly and have no lasting impact in the Father's Kingdom. (Lee Kunkel)

It is unnecessary to be anxious! It is foolish to worry. Our Father knows our needs.

Therefore, Jesus urges us to seek the Father's Kingdom – the one lasting and necessary thing – and these other things – temporary and relatively unimportant – will be given us.

In hearing that, we think that we now have to be anxious about the Father's Kingdom and worry about obtaining it through better behavior or a decisive act on our part. If that's the case, then all Jesus has done is transfer our anxiety and worry from one object to another. But He's not doing that.

Here's where it gets really great! We don't have to be afraid. We don't have to be anxious. We don't have to worry. Jesus says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Did you get that? The one thing that is necessary, the one thing that we need, the one thing that lasts forever – the Father's Kingdom – He is simply going to give to us. We don't have to find it. We don't have to obtain it. We don't have to earn it. He gives it to us, freely and without cost or obligation.

Our Heavenly Father did this by giving us His Son to be born as the Babe of Bethlehem, born under the Law. Jesus obeyed the Law of God perfectly and gave His perfect obedience to us as a gift in our account before God. Jesus gave up His life on the tree of the cross so that He might freely give us forgiveness for all of our sins. Because we have Christ's righteousness and Christ's forgiveness, the Father gives us His Kingdom, an unchangeable and eternal relationship with Him.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, as we trust in these free gifts which the Father gives us, the need to be anxious and the desire to worry fade away. For if the Father has done such great things for us as guarantee us eternity with Him in heaven, then He will surely do the relatively minor things to care for us on our journey there. As Scripture declares, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31-32)

Is it naïve to simply trust God and not worry? The world would say it was so. The Christian faith says that is what it is all about – trusting God and not worrying.

What about in difficult times? What about in times of need? Sometimes, we view the situation wrongly. It is not that we don't have what we need, but we don't have everything we want. God has promised to give us our needs. He has not promised to satisfy all of our greeds. But what about when Christians are in genuine need? Does that invalidate our faith? Not at all. Uncertainty need not cause us anxiety. Whatever happens will be under God's control. As Scripture promises, "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28)

Even when we suffer loss, we need not worry or be anxious. We may wonder where God is in all of this and whether He still cares. In the book of Romans, Paul asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35) In other words, what will break us away from God's mercy and care? Paul lists some possible answers: "Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" (Rom. 8:35) And then he answers His own question, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:38-39)

There you have it. If you have the Father's kingdom, then nothing else ultimately matters. If you don't have the Father's kingdom, then nothing, no matter how great, else can really help. You have the Father's Kingdom. He has given it to you freely by giving His Son who gave His life for you. You have His mercy and His provision for all of your needs. You have His love from which nothing can separate you. You have the cure for anxiety. Amen.