

Acts 1:6-14
1 Peter 5:6-11
May 17, 2026

Benediction

Today is Ascension Sunday. As we have heard from the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus was with his followers some time before the Pentecost festival, at which time he told them to wait . . . wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit, which would come from the Father.

Next week, *is of course*, Pentecost, which marks the arrival of that gift, which inaugurated the time of the Spirit.

But there is another kind of waiting that was also inaugurated. The angel at the Pentecost told them to stop staring at the sky, that Jesus would return as they saw him go. We await that Return. It has been nearly 2,000 years since these events took place. Among other things, it has often been a period of *anxious* waiting.

The letters of Peter, particularly the first one, address this situation. It is clear that the recipients were suffering while they waited, they were in a hard place, not merely because of short term, or temporary circumstances, but related to the general situation of their lives. The delay itself, of the Lord's Return, of Eternal righteousness and justice, is stressful. It is in that general situation that present day believers still find themselves.

So let us address the anxiety of our times. Anxiety can arise from situations directly associated with faith, when there is some kind of persecution, even if it is mild. Or it can come from general hardships found in life; health concerns, bereavements, financial stress, job or vocational loss, accidents and natural disasters and such things.

It can arise as the result of the actions of others. Sometimes it is our own fault. Sometimes it just is. In any case, it is common to struggle in this life. Anxiety attaches itself to the struggle.

According to Paul Tillich's way of defining things, anxiety is distinguished from fear because it doesn't take an object. In this view, with fear, there can be a plan because one knows the cause. Rather, anxiety is a general sense of alarm that appears to have no cause. It would be like asking a person why they are worried and receiving the answer, "no reason, just worried."

In modern medicine, there is such a thing as Anxiety Disorder, which occurs when these feelings are excessive, chronic, and unrelenting, or intense in such a way that the normal functioning of life is impeded, curtailed. It is characterized by a continual expectation of negative outcomes. Experts tell us that Social media has added to it. Industrialization has added to it. Technology has added to it.

It is fair to concede that like fear, anxiety has a *good* purpose as well, to keep a person alert and prepared for situations of danger, or threat. Anxiety is not a sin,

but can create the circumstances that lead to sinful actions.

To be sure, there are many helps; one can seek to change the circumstances; counseling, and psychological therapy; and when there are physiological ramifications, medical treatments under the care of a physician. They can all help.

If one asks, the healing professions may reserve this domain for themselves, but I suspect that many in that realm would acknowledge the spiritual nature of life as associated with anxiety and that faith and spiritual disciplines such a prayer also help. Even so, anxiety persists.

This situation, clearly addresses every audience in the bible, whether it be Israel, or the church is part of what is meant in the use of the term, “the human condition. Perhaps it has been over-emphasized, but all one has to do these days is listen, and hear the restless tales. And so at this point if I may, I would like to engage it again, and address anxiety at the level of, the Human Condition.

Many of the sources of anxiety come simply from the circumstances of earthly life and can be addressed in these various ways that I have mentioned, including the religious disciplines.

My guess is that if the truth were known, many of you could make better suggestions than I can about how to deal with anxious stress. But at this level this

anxiety addresses us as a challenge, might as well say it, a problem, *that can be solved*.

But what then? Underneath all the reasons we give for anxious living stands problems that humanly speaking, can't be solved. There is a Buechner quote that helps me here. He wrote,

“The preacher has to be willing to speak as tragic a word as Jesus speaks, which is the word that even if all the problems that can be solved are solved; poverty, war, disease, ignorance, injustice; and even if all the answers the world can give are proved each in its own way workable, even so, *man labors and is heavy laden in his helplessness*,” and then he uses a Shakespearean reference from King Lear, “poor naked wretch that bides the pelting of the pitiless storm that is no less pitiless for all the preaching of all the preachers.”

Anxiety is one of the words that we use to name one of the problems that humanly speaking, is not solvable.

When we speak of the human condition we refer to the unsolvable in life; issues related to mortality, thus anxiety about a lack of control over our own lives, of death itself; or moral concerns, the idea that we are forced to conclude is true, that along with life comes a moral demand which is beyond the human capacity to achieve, thus an anxiety about our failures, and the experience of guilt.

Adding to that anxiety comes the concern, perhaps most characteristic of the modern period, about the meaning of life. We want to live genuinely and feel good about our lives and about the way we have spent our days. We want there to be a legacy, that is, we want to be remembered.

Peter approaches his readers with these words;

“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he will lift you up. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Peter insists that God cares for each of us, and is not aloof but near, does not fail to understand the predicaments common to all people, and our trust is founded on God’s decisive action in Christ Jesus.

Let me suggest that in addition to anxious waiting, we should consider this period in God’s history, the Time of the Spirit, as one of *joyful* waiting. Not because the *world’s history* is joyful, too often it is not. Rather, grounded in the trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit, nurturing and guiding, protecting, anxiety is neutralized.

In the context of patient, Spirit-filled waiting, we cast our cares upon the Lord, in the firm knowledge that God cares, revealed in Christ Jesus . . . crucified for the Forgiveness of Sin, raised in victory over death, to new life.

Paul speaks of a, “peace surpassing understanding.” “So do not worry about your life,” Jesus says, “saying, ‘what shall we eat?’ or, ‘what shall we drink?’ or, ‘what shall we wear?’ For the Pagans run after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you as well.’”

A benediction is often thought of as a blessing at the end of the service. It simply means, “good speaking,” and stands as God’s good word to us.

And here after Peter calls for humility and the casting of anxiety on God, offers the following benediction, “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, *will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast*. To him be the power forever and ever.”

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