

I'm Worried about My Anxiety Level

[Text – Luke 12:22-34]

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August 7, 2016

The word “anxious” has two diametrically differing tones. One of them denotes a fearful distress; while the other conveys a positive hopefulness. I imagine that most of us have experienced both of these types of anxiousness: the uneasy, queasy feeling that something horrible is looming on the horizon; and the excited anticipation that something good is about to happen. In this morning's New Testament reading, Jesus indicates that there can be a connective relationship between these two types of anxiety. He says, “Do not be anxious, do not worry about your life, what you will eat . . . or what you will wear, for Life is more than food and clothing...And can any of you, by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” The answer is “No!” In fact, we're more likely to reduce our Life-span by our anxious worrying.

Jesus then goes on to say that there *is* something for which we can anxiously await, and aspire: “Eagerly strive for the Divine Realm, and all these other things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Holy One's good pleasure to give you the Holy Realm.” In other words, when you and I focus our attention on the bigger, positive picture - when we anxiously anticipate and strive for that Divine Realm, then all those other anxiety producing “things” will fall into their proper perspective.

Anxiety and fear can be natural responses when you or I are faced with uncertain or unfamiliar things. There *are* times and situations when our intuitive sense of fear can be helpful - by alerting us to potential risks or dangers. The real risk, however, is when people try to manipulate that natural sense of fear, to imply that *different* equals *dangerous*, and that personal safety and security must always be placed above taking risks. The problem with this kind of mind-set, is that it can perpetuate negative stereotypes against anything anyone that is “different”. And it can also reinforce the notion that watching-out for “myself” must take precedence over concern for others. The problem is, that neither of those two approaches fit the message or the mission of Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself is certainly “different” - and according to Scripture, he spends the majority of his time with those who are also perceived as being different, suspect, and less-than-desirable. He runs around with the kind of people who aren't welcome by mainstream religion or society, because of their economic status, their diseases, their vocations, or their sexual practices. They are the outcasts, the lepers, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the so-called “sinners” and “outsiders” - the kind of people who the “good, God-fearing” people fearfully want to ban from their land. Yet these are the very people to whom Jesus

is drawn; people who he genuinely loves and actually enjoys being with! With eyes wide-open, Jesus opens himself to be available and vulnerable to these marginalized individuals; knowing full well the danger involved. Not the danger of those people themselves, but the danger of going against the grain of established societal and religious norms.

Talk about the potential for anxiety! To be a well known rabbi and public figure, yet to live and move and identify with the lowly dregs of society, certainly isn't the way to make friends with influential or powerful people. Yet this is definitely the way of Jesus Christ, even though it brings him severe criticism, harsh rejection, and eventually a brutal and violent death. Nevertheless, rather than cautiously heeding the voice of *fear*, Jesus chooses to listen to that inner-voice of *faith*. Rather than being anxious about the rules and regulations, or running with the right crowd, Jesus chooses - and highly recommends - a *higher* kind of anxiety. "Anxiously strive for the Divine Realm," Jesus says, "And all these other things will take care of themselves. . . . Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Holy One's good pleasure to give you the Holy Realm."

The Divine Realm is offered to us all as a Gift. But this gift - like any other gift - is impossible to take hold of, when we are fearfully clinging to other things. When I hold-on to my prejudices about other people, I can't join hands with them to help build a better world. When I anxiously cling to my possessions as a way of securing my life, I am unable to freely share those things with others. And when I allow the anxious voice of my fears and doubts to play and re-play in my mind, I cannot hear that inner voice of Faith, calling me to a more wholesome, gracious, and peaceful way of living.

In 1933, Adolph Hitler took over as chancellor of Germany, and the entire world was in the throes of the Great Depression. Unemployment in the United States was 25%, and there were record numbers of personal and businesses bankruptcies, loan defaults, and bank failures. Millions of Americans were homeless and hungry, lining-up in soup kitchens and living in ragged huts and makeshift shanty towns. A severe drought gripped the Midwest, creating the "Dust Bowl" - with winds picking-up the loose earth, swirling it into dense clouds that choked the life out of crops and cattle - wreaking havoc across the land. In 1933, in his Presidential Inaugural Address, Franklin Roosevelt said to a truly troubled nation: "Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself - nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

Wow! How refreshingly different that is from today's politicians who intentionally paint the bleakest, most depressing, apocalyptic picture of our nation, in order to stir-up and intensify people's greatest anxieties and reactionary responses. Granted, there is real fear in our land; real problems and real pain.

Nonetheless, playing upon people's worst anxieties and fears, finding scapegoats to blame, and viciously attacking those who disagree with us is not the answer.

None of us can see what lies ahead; yet all of us can strive to envision - and to trust - that the Holy Source of Life is still in charge. And when you and I truly trust that we are ultimately safe and secure in the loving hands of our Heavenly Parent, we will put things in their proper perspective. We will value the wonderfully diverse people and world around us. We will hold-on to what is truly honorable, and let-go of the rest. By anxiously setting our sights on the awesome Realm of Divine Love, you and I are be set free from Life's lesser anxieties.

Free to reach out to others - not with fear, but with faith, hope, and love;

Free to share the many blessings that we ourselves receive each day;

Free to proclaim the *Good*News of a Divine Love that overcomes and drives-away all fears.

So, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Holy One's good pleasure to give *you* the Holy Realm!"