

Anxiety

Fear, in a broken world, has it's uses. "Maybe I shouldn't wander down that dark alley at night." "Maybe I shouldn't go a hundred miles per hour around that curve." Fear is a healthy reaction to danger.

And so we all grapple with this spectrum of fear, what risks can we take that are worth it ("Will I fly over an ocean for that once in a lifetime trip?), what precautions can we take (I'm not afraid to drive, but putting a seatbelt on seems reasonable)? It's a spectrum. The soldier is going to be scared going into battle, they would be crazy if they weren't. But the person who can't go outside at all? The person who can't sleep? This is someone who struggles with anxiety.

Because too much fear controls us, makes us unable to think clearly, it can paralyze us. We can't go into crowds because we are so anxious, we can't go out at night because something MIGHT be lurking in the shadows. We can't shoot that ball like we've done a thousand times before because all the eyes are watching us. We can't start that relationship because we've been hurt before.

The person who struggles with anxiety sees danger everywhere. And they are experts at seeing the worst case scenario. A drive through the mountains is just an exercise in wondering which will come first, the head on collision or the plunge off

the cliff to the icy waters below. And the sad reality is... sometimes that stuff happens! How can we find any peace in a world of worst-case scenarios?

Our premise today is this: “Jesus suffered the worst case scenario, so that we can be brave.”

The scriptures are full of talk of fear and worry. So many times the scriptures tell us to not be afraid. Our Lord himself talks of the sparrows and the lilies and how he cares for them. And then he tells us, who are more valuable than they, not to worry. And, blasphemous as it is, in the back of my mind I wonder, “Jesus, telling someone not to worry when they are worried is like telling your wife to calm down when she’s upset.” It doesn’t seem to make the problem go away! If anything, sometimes we read Jesus telling us not to worry and now, not only are we still worrying, but we feel bad for worrying because we know we shouldn’t, but we can’t help it!

But of course, our Lord knows us better than we might think. Or, if I can put it another way, he knows our problems more than we do. And he knows how to solve them. So he isn’t saying “don’t worry” to shame us for feeling a certain way, he is saying, “don’t worry” because he is more than able and ready to help. In fact, he already has – but more on that later.

And so, when God and his messengers tell us in the scriptures to “not be afraid,” it’s not to shame us for feeling a certain way but because God is in charge of the outcome of the situation and know it will not be for our harm. If God wanted to hurt us, trust me, He could. But He doesn’t want to and so He is well within His rights to say, “don’t worry.”

And yet, even as we confess how strong God is and we know his power to save, we look at the news, at the doctors report, at the reality that we all get old and die and we think, well “He’s gonna let something happen to us, eventually.” And so we worry.

Those who struggle with anxiety are paralyzed by these thoughts, it makes them unable to see past the possible worst case scenarios, it makes them unable to focus on “the good” because they know it has to leave at some point.

And so when I am talking to someone with anxiety, I think the best approach is to be honest. To admit that suffering and pain will come our way and the “worst case scenario” is possible. My family in our SUV could plunge off the side of the road and it makes me sick just thinking about it. But let’s think about it... Number one: is my worrying going to change the road conditions? No, so it isn’t exactly helpful in that sense; other than to tell me wife to drive safe. But more importantly, the second point: if the Lord lets such tragedy to happen, does it mean the story is

over? Or is there something after, something past the “worst case scenario”? For those in Christ - You better believe it!

We are so often unable to see past the worst case scenarios. We are unable to see past death. And I get it, it's because we don't have a whole lot of data on what happens after death – so we flock to our “five minutes in heaven” books about people who have died and been resuscitated. But before we go there, lets recall the one person we do know who died and came back: Jesus!

The disciples were told multiple times that Jesus would die and rise, but it doesn't even compute. They rebuke Jesus saying “Surely, you can't die like that!” And It's as if they didn't even hear him talk about the resurrection. They can't see past death. Then, they see him die and they think, “that's it, the game's over, the story is over, too bad.”

Our Gospel reading today ends with Jesus put in a tomb. Is that the end of the Gospel of Mark? I know it was a long reading but believe it or not – there's more! And praise God there is! If Jesus in the tomb is the end of the story – go home, batten down the hatches and try and squeeze every minute out of life you can because it's all you got. And you better hope that when you do die its “on your terms” or “without a whole lot of suffering.” You better hope your death isn't the worst case scenario like Jesus' was - full of betrayal, lies, insults, beatings, spit,

nails, torture, and beyond all that the wrath of the Father for sin. Yes Jesus, far more than we realize, had the worst case scenario for the end of his ministry and life.

But, praise God, that isn't the end of the story. Jesus rises, he lives, he reigns.

Which shows that this death was not because he was a failure, no, it was his plan to bring about life for his people. And so, when he is risen, the disciples finally get it!

That there is more going on than some blessings here and now, than getting "your best life now." There is a Kingdom eternal! And so they are brave to proclaim it in a broken world and, let me tell you, those disciples, they get some "worst case scenarios," one is skinned alive, others speared, decapitated, arrested, exiled, tortured. But they could see past that – to the eternal life won for them by their Savior so in the midst of the brokenness they were brave. Thanks to Jesus taking sin, death, and hell for them, they could be brave.

Each Sunday, each Easter, and each day let us look past the newspaper headlines and the obituaries, let us look past that to the eternal life won by Jesus. He is stronger than anything you fear. Luther wrote: "Faith is a living, unshakable confidence in God's grace; it is so certain that someone would die a thousand times for it." In other words he says, "give me a thousand worst case scenarios, I'll take them all, as long as I have Jesus. Because he will raise me up."

And we might say, “Oh my faith isn’t that strong.” Then go to Jesus for more grace. He has shown his mercy on a cross. And he has promised faith the size of a mustard seed will accomplish great miracles, miracles like people like us being raised up on the last day.

But back to the scriptures, I’ve already mentioned the times they tell us not to worry or fear. But there are times they do tell us to fear. They tell us to fear the Lord. To fear the Lord is not just to “respect” him, its more than that. It is to acknowledge he is the strongest, mightiest, holiest, scariest thing in the universe. You can’t outrun him, you can’t outwit him, you can’t hide from him, you cannot speak a word against him. This is why our Catechism reminds us we should *fear*, love, and trust in God above all things. But our Lord is no monster seeking to devour us. As we have already shown, he comes to save. He comes to take the worst this world can throw at us and he has overcome it. His love and faithfulness abound. Which is why we can trust his promises that there is more even after the “worst case scenarios.”

So let us be people who are brave. Not reckless, but people who are able to look past “the worst case scenarios” and to life everlasting. And in that respect the worst case scenario for anyone is to lose Jesus. Cling to him and his word. He is real he is risen!

So ultimately, we do not fight anxiety with the “power of positive thinking” as if we just ignore the hardship in the world. No that won’t save us from it. We fight our fears with the REALITY of Goodness and hope found in a Savior who suffered for us, but that’s not the end, because he rose again and, no matter what fate befalls us, so will we.

“Jesus suffered the worst case scenario for us, so we can be brave.”