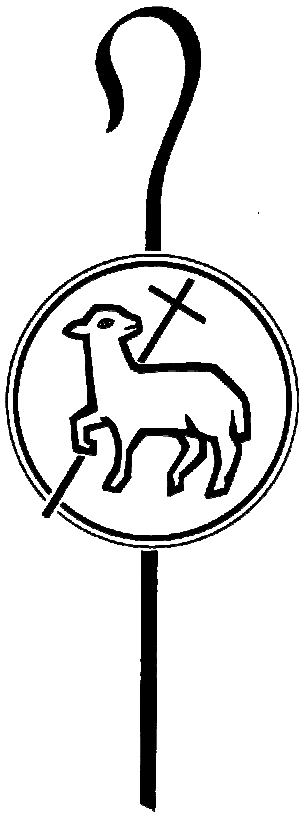


feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

June 12, 2012

Dear Church Family,



“Do not be anxious about anything...” This is the third imperative that Paul gives to the Philippians. As with the first two, it is the word *anything* that makes this especially challenging. I suspect that all of us have things in our lives that cause us to be anxious. It is helpful to look closely at the Greek word (*merimnao*) translated anxious because we discover that it is not always a bad thing. Certainly in Jesus’ teaching from Luke 12, *“Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body what you will wear...”*, *merimnao* is prohibited. However there are other places where it means to care about something in a good way (as earlier in the letter where Paul commends Timothy as one *“who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.”* The word essentially means to be concerned about something. This can be a healthy or godly concern or it can be expressed as anxiety. One way to not be anxious about anything is to stop caring. This however is not the Christian response to anxiety. The way that we continue to care, and even deepen our care for others without anxiety, is through prayer.

As stated by one saint, “the way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.” That is what Paul says, *“In everything, by prayer and petition...”* It is also the teaching of 1 Peter 5:7, *“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”* This is what Jesus is saying in Luke 12. God cares about us and our need for food and clothing. (*“Your Father knows that you need them”*). So we can trust Him to take care of those needs. Further, our worrying does nothing to help us because we lack the power to make things happen. *“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest”* Our cares and concerns become anxieties when we lack the power to provide or protect ourselves or loved ones. So we should bring our concerns to the one who does have the power to provide and protect. This is the only way to not be anxious. It really is a choice between trusting God or continuing to trust in ourselves.

So we are told to bring everything to God in prayer *“with thanksgiving.”* Coming with an attitude of thanksgiving puts us in the right posture before the Lord. When we practice this, we are focusing on Him and what He has already done for us, rather than focusing on our need or concern. By practicing thanksgiving, God becomes bigger and more important to us than our cares. Not that we do not have the cares any longer, but they find their place within the reality of God. And this then helps us to trust Him.

The promise is that we will then have the *“peace of God.”* Peace is the opposite of anxiety, so we really need this peace. Yet many have difficulty finding and maintaining it. I think this passage can really help us to find and maintain this peace. Since trusting in God is the key to this peace, the practice of thanksgiving in prayer is crucial. But this is not being thankful for the answer to our request. This peace is not a result of having our requests granted. The request has only been presented or made known. The care that could lead to anxiety still exists. It has not been taken care of and therefore we have this peace. No, this peace is experienced in the midst of the circumstances that would cause anxiety. This is peace in the midst of a storm. If we are only looking for the peace which is the calming of the storm, we can miss this peace of God that Paul is talking about.

This peace “*transcends all understanding*.” What does that mean? One view is that the peace of God cannot be understood and is beyond understanding. This seems true, but I do not think it fully captures the meaning. Paul has used this word translated *transcend* twice already in this letter (“*better than*” in 2:3 and “*surpassing greatness*” in 3:8). So rather than being the object of understanding, this peace could be seen as being compared to understanding and being of surpassing greatness or better than our understanding. But better for what? The peace of God is far better at keeping us from anxiety than our understanding. When we are faced with circumstances that make us anxious, our fleshly way of trying to gain peace is by figuring out the situation. We seek to understand it in a way that puts us back in control. That is why we will be up at night, thinking and analyzing the situation from all directions. That is worrying. But that will not bring peace with situations that are beyond our control. One reason we fail to find this peace is that we want the peace of God, and to have it all figured out in our understanding. But when we turn to our understanding, we lose the peace of God. As Gordon Fee comments, “God’s people do not need to have it all figured out in order to trust him!” Often needing to have it all figured out will hinder us from trusting Him.

We looked at James 1:2-8, where the man who doubts “*should not think he will receive anything from the Lord*.” And we noted that the word translated doubt has a lot to do with understanding. You will need to listen to the sermon for that section, but the main point is from Proverbs 3:5 “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding*.” There are times in our lives when our understanding will cause us to doubt the Lord. This is not always the case, but it often is during times of trial or anxiety. During those times, we can have peace when we trust God, but when we try to lean on our understanding of the situation, we just end up in anxiety because we cannot figure it out.

The story of Peter walking on the water in Matthew 14 is a biblical example of this dynamic in operation. When Peter had his eyes on Jesus (trusting in Him) he was able to walk on the water. But when he started to try and understand what he was doing, he naturally concluded that what he was doing was impossible and he began to sink. And we noted that it was seeing the wind that caused him to be afraid. Now the passage tells us that this wind died down, but only after Jesus had led Peter back into the boat. I imagine if the wind had stopped the second that Peter stepped out of the boat it would have been a lot easier for him to keep walking on the water toward Jesus. But that is not what happened.

The peace of God is there for us while the wind is still blowing. One key to knowing this peace is to not turn our eyes back to our situation and try to understand it and figure it out after we have prayed. Often, the wind, the cause for anxiety, will still be there and you will not get any further in figuring it all out, feeling like you are back in control. That is why the peace of God guards our hearts and minds. It keeps our hearts and minds from the feelings and thoughts that will bring us back into anxiety. Do not abandon that place of peace by trying to understand or figure out your situation on your own. That is being double-minded and allowing your mind to seek peace through understanding and control rather than staying focused on the Lord and trusting in Him.

Do not be anxious about anything... This command, which invites us into a place of peace, is also great evangelism. When we are able to walk through anxious circumstances with peace, it is a significant witness to the reality of the Lord in our lives. In this world of anxiety, people will take notice. So let’s encourage one another with this command and bless one another with the peace of God.

In Christ Jesus,
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<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)