

Turning Down the Noise
Week 6: The Noise of Uncertainty
Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

Morning Routine: Coffee, Bible, Games, News

Snapshot from this week's headlines: Iran, Inflation, El Nino, Hantavirus. Sometimes makes me want to just go back to bed!

Zoom call in 2020 with a group of pastors trying to navigate leading a church in the midst of COVID and all the political turmoil of that year. The presenter said, "Sustained stress and extended ambiguity are a cocktail for anxiety and depression." I've thought about that a lot over the last 6 years, but also over the last 6 days as I've prepared this sermon. If I had to capture where a lot of people are that I talk to these days, "Sustained stress" and "Extended ambiguity" would do it.

We live in a very uncertain world. And to make it worse, our minds are really good at turning uncertainty into catastrophe. I don't know about you, but sometimes, it's like a warped version of *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* up here in my brain!

If you bomb a sermon, you'll probably replay every line in your head on the drive home.

If you replay every line in your head, you'll remember that dumb thing you said in Middle School.

If you remember that dumb thing you said in Middle School, you'll start wondering, "Why do I do this?"

If you wonder why you do this, you'll realize it's because you have no other marketable skills.

And if you think about that for too long, you'll start imagining yourself living in a van down by the river!

Our minds are really good at spiraling uncertainty into catastrophe.

If you read one bad headline, you'll probably start worrying about the economy. If you worry about the economy, you'll wonder if you have enough for retirement...

If you feel a strange pain in your side, you'll probably Google it. If you Google it, you'll likely convince yourself it's terminal...

If your boss says, "Can we talk tomorrow?," you'll probably assume you're getting fired.

The noise of uncertainty just echoes and escalates in our minds, robbing us of peace. Scripture is honest about this uncertainty that we feel. In the passage Quentin read for us, the Teacher says, “People are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them” (Eccl. 9:12).

In other words, life is fragile. Things happen that we didn’t plan for, we can’t predict, and we’d certainly never choose. Ecclesiastes refuses to pretend that life is in our control. It’s honest about the reality that, sometimes things just happen, and no amount of planning can fully protect us from the uncertainties we face.

So, what do we do with that? Do we just throw up our hands and say, “Why even try?” Do we double down on our efforts to control the things and people around us? How are we supposed to live in a world where so much feels uncertain? Our text today gives us some insight. If you have your Bible, or Bible app open, look at it with me. Ecclesiastes 11...(READ vs. 1-2)

Some say verse 1 is a take on an ancient proverb that says, “Toss your grain into the ocean and bread will come back to you.” Be charitable and those gifts will wash back up to you as a reward. But I think the point the Teacher is trying to make is that everything meaningful in life requires stepping into uncertainty.

The modern day equivalent of verse 1 might be, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” Everything in life requires a little risk. A merchant sends his grain off to sea in hopes that a profit will return. There’s a risk involved in that. A storm could sink the ship. It could hit a reef or get attacked by pirates. But the fear of what *could* happen shouldn’t keep us from taking some risks in our life.

But then he balances verse 1 with verse 2. Just because something requires risk doesn’t mean we have to be foolish. A modern equivalent of verse 2 could be, “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” In other words, don’t be paralyzed by fear, but don’t be dumb about the risks you take, either. Just know that there’s no such thing as a certain thing, no matter how good the sales pitch is. So take risks, but be wise about the risks you take.

Everything meaningful in life comes with uncertainty. Marriage, parenting, generosity, obedience...if we wait until we have all the answers and feel like we’re perfectly prepared for every challenge we might face, then we’ll never enter into any of them. But that also doesn’t mean we’re supposed to just blindly run into them, either. Living by faith always means being willing to move without the assurance of a guarantee, but, if we ask for it, God promises to give us an abundance of wisdom along the way.

And then we get to verse 3...(READ Eccl. 11:3-4)

Even if you make the wisest choices in life, things still happen that are out of our control. Verse 3, storms happen and calamity comes that we can’t predict or control. And, for some

of us, that leads to a kind of “paralysis by analysis.” It’s why verse 4 is one of the most relatable verses in the book of Ecclesiastes, “Whoever watches the wind will not plant.”

Our fear of uncertainty can quickly become an excuse for passivity. “I’m waiting for the perfect time.” “I just need to do a little more research before pulling the trigger.” “I need to think about it a little longer.” “I’ll trust God once I know how it’s going to work out.”

These excuses can sound really good, even wise. But as Billy Sunday, the baseball player, turned mildly-irreverent preacher once said, “An excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.”

It’s always wise to do your research and not rush into things, but uncertainty can leave us paralyzed by fear and these good reasons become lousy excuses for passivity. Sure, nothing bad will happen, but nothing good will happen either. As one commentary I read put it, “Face the facts that things go wrong, but get out there and do your work anyway” (The New American Commentary).

And here’s why we can’t wait for certainty before we act...(READ Eccl. 11:5-6)

The truth that none of us like to admit is that we’re not as in control of things as we like to think we are and **we don’t know as much** as we like to think we do. The phrase, “You do not know” is used 3x in these 6 verses...

vs 2, “**You do not know** what disaster may come upon the land.”

vs. 5, “**You do not know** the path of the wind, or how the body is formed.”

vs. 6, “**You do not know** which will succeed.”

We do not have certainty in outcomes, in timing, or in circumstances. The only thing we have certainty about is God’s character. His goodness. His faithfulness. His kindness and patience and love. And so, we do the best we can do with the information we have, and we trust Him with what we can’t do and what do not know.

We walk in faith that, no matter what the outcomes, timing, or circumstances...no matter what the uncertainty is we’re facing, we can be certain of who God is for us, and that His affections are set on us. And that kind of trust starts to turn down the noise of uncertainty in our lives.

So, what do we do with this? A couple of things as we wrap up. First, I think **the noise of uncertainty exposes what we really trust**. When things feel uncertain, do you trust your own efforts, your intuition, your knowledge. When times are uncertain, do you look to your portfolio for comfort? Do you rely on your parenting skills and the latest book you’ve read or podcast you heard?

And I'm not saying any of those things are bad things...they're just not the ultimate things. We eventually come to the end of what our effort and intuition and knowledge can produce. We long for the certainties that money can't buy. We run into the buzzsaw of those teenage years that make us wonder if we know anything at all and if the sanctifying work of Jesus is doing *anything* inside of us!

I'm so grateful in those times that we can turn to Jesus. The Christian faith is not the absence of uncertainty. It's learning who to trust in the middle of it. It's resting in Him and walking with Him through the uncertainty of life. And something beautiful happens as we walk in this kind of faith and trust. We become a non-anxious presence in the middle of an overly anxious world. We're able to come alongside of others in the midst of their uncertainties and be the hands and hope of Jesus.

Recently, some guys in our church got to do just that for a special lady in our community. Check out this video...[\(Shannon's New Home Video\)](#)

We live in an uncertain world and we don't know what will happen tomorrow, but we know the One who does. And as we walk with Jesus in faith and trust, He gives us peace in the midst of our uncertainty and invites us to share it with others facing their own uncertainties in life. Beautiful things happen when we walk with that kind of faith.

As we close, I just want to ask you two questions to think about today.

1. [Where do you turn when the illusion of certainty disappears?](#)

Do you look to yourself, or do you look to the Lord, the Maker of all things?

2. [What feels uncertain to you today?](#)

Uncertain in our world? Uncertain in your world?

Turning down the noise of uncertainty doesn't mean we have all the answers. It means learning to trust the voice of Jesus more than the fear of the unknown.

Pause App – ["Jesus, I give everyone and everything to you."](#)

We're going to practice this prayer now so you will hopefully put it into practice this week.

Response Time

Invitation: You don't have to face uncertainty alone. Jesus and Church community.

Communion: The cross and resurrection of Jesus silences the noise of uncertainty. A peace this world, and anything we face, cannot take away.