

Sermon for Sunday, August 11, 2019 - “A Very Present Help in Trouble”

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 11, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[based on Luke 12: 22-34](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Jesus says, “I tell you, do not worry.” That’s pretty much been my life goal for the last four and a half weeks as my son Nathan recovers from traumatic injuries.

You know, as I do, how hard it is not to worry when you get that awful call, when you’re waiting for the surgery to be over, when the future feels uncertain.

There’s also so much that is worrisome in the larger society. I remember my colleague at Luther College, David Vasquez, commenting on increased levels of anxiety among college students. He said, “We often view their anxiety as abnormal when really, they’re having a normal response to the very abnormal state of affairs around them.” In these times, “do not worry” can feel like a pretty tall order.

And yet I know that if I can let go of worry, I can be so much more present for Nathan, for my whole family, for all of you, and more helpful in the healing process. When I let go of worry, I can experience God’s constant presence more deeply and help others to experience it as well. The same is true in the larger world. If we get stuck in anxiety about gun violence, immigration, climate change and other issues, it’s much harder for us to work for hopeful change. Letting go of anxiety is important for healing.

So, I’ve spent a lot of time in the last month doing things that help me deal with worry - things I do regularly but have prioritized a lot this month.

I do a silent breath prayer in the morning.

I make sure to get out in God’s creation every day.

There’s a prayer mantra I repeat as I walk.

I do yoga; I swim.

I especially love to swim outside at the Decorah pool in the mornings. There’s something so uplifting about being in the water outside as the sun rises and bursts through the morning fog.

I’ve also been using a number of resources from the Mayo Clinic Patient Education Services and the Calm Meditation app.

These and so many other tools are gifts of God to help with the worry and fear that are such a part of our daily lives.

I’ve been struck that the teaching and tools about letting go of anxiety all emphasize three key things:

First, it’s important for us to be out in nature.

Second, it helps to get out of our heads with all their anxious thoughts; we need to be in our bodies moving, making music, singing and releasing the tension that builds up.

Third, it is important to connect with the breath. Paying attention to the natural rhythm of our breath as well as taking deep breaths can really help us let go of anxiety.

I was reflecting and praying about those three things as I was swimming at the Decorah pool this past Wednesday and suddenly it dawned on me that we experience these three things in relation to our triune God. God, our creator, savior and sustainer, gives us the very gifts we need to help with anxiety.

God our creator calls us out into the natural world full of abundance, power and beauty - out where creation itself can help to soothe our anxiety, uplift and cleanse us. We are called to consider the birds, consider the lilies so that we might see how much God cares for us and all that God has made. God our creator also works through doctors, researchers and medications that can give our besieged brains help with debilitating anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses. Many of us need medication in order to get out of bed and get moving, singing and praying. So, thanks be to God our creator for the science of psychiatry.

Yet, God didn't just create us and then leave us be. Our triune God also came to be present with us in the body in the person of Jesus. Jesus came to tend and heal and feed our bodies, to help us know that our fragile, broken bodies are forgiven and loved - precious to God. Jesus still comes to us today in his body and blood to feed our bodies in tangible ways.

And even though the person of Jesus is no longer walking around among us, still we are never alone. Our triune God is present to us in the Holy Spirit, which is the very breath of God. As we breathe, our spirits are connected to this Spirit breath of God. The book of Romans tells us that the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. When all we can do is sigh, the Spirit is praying within us.

God doesn't just tell us, "Do not worry, do not be afraid, all right, good luck with that." No, God comes to be in relationship with us. And in relationship with this triune God, we are given help with worry and anxiety through the gifts of creation, our bodies and the breath.

Our triune God also calls us out of the isolation and separation caused by anxiety and into abundant, life giving community with all God's people. We are called out of our heads with their anxious thoughts and into the work of service and love, healing and care.

God promises to be a very present help in trouble and says, "I will be with you always." God is present with us in all the moments of our days - in the hopeful times and in the stressful times - working for healing. We can't always see it, we don't always experience it, we still live in hurting and broken bodies and a hurting and broken world. Yet, we are not alone. God is at work.

Beloved, today God is here for you. God is present in this abundant, beautiful creation with all its many gifts. God is present in Christ's body and blood and in all our broken, beloved bodies that make up the body of Christ on earth. This body of Christ is sent out to love and tend every body on earth, all people. God is also present as we breathe together - inhaling deeply of God's love, exhaling together with songs and prayers of lament and hope.

Today, consider the lilies, receive nourishment for your body, breathe deeply in community. Do not be afraid.

Let's take time for silent prayer, breathing in God's presence, letting go of anxiety.