**Philippians 4:4-9 Harvest Thanksgiving 13/2/22**

**Video link:** [**https://youtu.be/B11EgQxKogk**](https://youtu.be/B11EgQxKogk)

For many years I was full of anxiety every time I preached. I would have sleepless Saturday evenings, at times waking up with panic attacks, experiencing stomach pains, shortness of breath, and lying awake for hours full of anxiety… Very few people get through life without some anxiety. For many people, there are times when anxiety becomes a real burden. One of the key things I have discovered about anxiety is that the source of almost all anxiety comes from the mind.

When something bad happens in your life it is normal to spend time thinking about that thing and coming to terms with it. In life many things can happen that may concern us. Things such as a chronic or even terminal illness that you or someone you love has been diagnosed with, the loss of a job or a business, long term unemployment and lack of money to meet your commitments. Often anxiety is about things that might happen. You have to preach a sermon or give a speech and you might mess up or people might not like what you have to say. You have an exam and you might not be able to answer the questions correctly, even though you have studied hard. You have a job interview, and you might not make a good enough impression. You are going to an event and maybe no one will talk to you or if they do you won’t know what to say.

Our concern becomes worry when we can’t stop thinking about the bad things that are happening or that might happen. The more we worry the more our thoughts about those things consume us. Instead of helping us to come to terms with the bad things that are happening, worry exaggerates them in our minds. Not only does worry cause us to dwell far too much on the bad things in our lives. Worry also leads us to think about the worst-case outcomes. Often worry leads us to us thinking about all kinds of terrible possibilities. When worry gets a hold of you even the smallest problem can fill your mind with thoughts of catastrophe. The result is anxiety.

When I find myself lying awake at night full of anxiety and unable to sleep, one of the things I have found most helpful is to pray to God. When you pray to God you are sharing your worries with the person who has power over all things. In The Message version, Paul’s words to the Philippians are put this way, *‘Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the centre of your life’* (Phil. 4:6). Prayer is a great way of relieving your anxiety.

Sometimes worrying about your problems can become so overwhelming that you try to ignore them and pretend they don’t exist. If you don’t think about them and don’t talk about them then maybe you can convince yourself they don’t exist. Then maybe you can stop becoming anxious. The problem is that deep down you know your problems are still there and the anxiety will eventually bubble up in unexpected ways.

The truth is that we live in a world broken by sin and that means that at some time in our lives, and for most of us, quite often in our lives, we will find ourselves facing some difficulty. Ignoring it won’t make it go away. Yet by faith, we also know that no matter what problem we face, with Jesus in our lives we never face it alone. Therefore, one of the best things we can do is face our problems head-on as they arise. Accept that bad things will happen in your lives, but with Christ no matter how bad they are, they are not the end of our story. No matter how bad things get, the end of our story is always living in peace with Jesus.

Christ by his life, death and resurrection has shown us that nothing is impossible for him. There is no problem that we will ever experience that Jesus cannot handle and Jesus promises to always be with us. As Paul reminds us, *‘neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord’* (Rom 8:38-39, NIV).

You can spend your time in worry about all manner of things and fill your life with anxiety, or you can focus your mind on those things that will bring you peace. Our minds are very good at conjuring up all kinds of terrible and frightening scenarios, but God has also given us the power to change how we think.

Yes, face the problems in your life head-on, and share them with God in prayer, seeking God’s guidance and trusting that Jesus will stay by your side all the way through any trouble. Then having placed your concerns in God’s hands, stop dwelling on your problems and imagining the worst.

Instead, fill your mind and meditate *‘on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse’* (Phil 4:8 The Message). Filling your mind with these things will help you to stop worrying. It will reduce your anxiety and transform your character into a reflection of the character of Jesus. It will give you peace even in the midst of the storms of life and then the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

**Pastor Rolf Lungwitz**