

SLIDE 1. Series: INCARNATION

Teaching: *Ministry, Mission and Mental Health*

Sunday January 26.2025

We've been talking about *incarnation* this month – how we show up – like Christ – on this planet – in our days - in ministry using our spiritual gifts – and on mission – being light to our world and making disciples – because we know and follow Jesus Christ.

But not every day is a good day. Not every moment is like surfing a rainbow. And all of us worry from time to time.

Many of us – if not all of us - experience *anxiety*: feeling overwhelmed, struggling with racing thoughts, difficulty concentrating, panic, fear, irritability, frustration.

SLIDE 2. Some FACTS about ANXIETY

1. Anxiety can be genetic: there is data to suggest that anxiety disorders and anxious temperaments can run in families.

2. Anxiety can begin in childhood: it can look like stomach and headaches, temper tantrums, restlessness, inattention, meltdowns.

3. Anxiety can trigger depression: For example, people who struggle with Social Anxiety Disorder often develop depressive symptoms as a result of lifestyle choices made in order to accommodate the symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder, such as avoiding others and public places.

4. Anxiety can produce physical symptoms: like weakness, shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, nausea, hot flashes, dizziness. For example, people experiencing a panic attack often end up in the ER believing they are having a heart attack.

Taken from: <https://arcadiancounseling.com/10-surprising-facts-about-anxiety/>

In Canada – in 2022 – more than 5 million people met the diagnostic criteria for a mood disorder, anxiety or substance use disorder, with the prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders increasing substantially over the previous 10 years.

Taken from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230922/dq230922b-eng.htm>

Anxiety is on the rise.

And while it might sound like an oversimplification to say that this shouldn't surprise us – since we are a country that has become more and more secular and less and less sacred – it might also be mostly true.

Jesus addressed fear and worry and anxiety all throughout the gospels – as a diagnostic of the condition of our spiritual hearts and then as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

SLIDE 3. He tells us: *Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? (Mt. 6:25).*

What do you worry about? And what might this say about what you value? Because I think it fair to say that what we value is also what we prioritize.

Jesus reminds us in Mt. 6 that life is short, and we can't take anything with us.

If we value food and drink and clothing and other stuff – other perishables – above and beyond the priorities of a life with God – like loving Him and loving our neighbors – like being in ministry and being on mission – of course we will become anxious about other stuff if it becomes scarce or threatened.

But when our hearts align with God's values – we will see the dangers around us differently. Threats and scarcity and even death – won't produce the same fear in us when we take on God's perspective of things.

We can miss a meal or two or three – because we will know – by experience – that *man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God* (Deut. 8:3; Mt. 4:4).

We can live – for a while – without eating. And then there is always food to be had.

We can be thirsty and not worry – because we will know – by experience – that *whoever believes in Jesus – out of his heart will flow rivers of living water* (Jn. 7:38).

We can live – for a while – without drinking. And then there is always water to be had.

We can be less concerned about what we wear – because we will know – by experience – that the body is for more than clothes – *your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God* (1 Cor. 6:19).

We can live – for a while – without upgrading our wardrobe – and then there is always thrifting.

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Mt. 6:26-34).

SLIDE 4. God invites me to overcome my anxiety by focusing on what He values.

And all the other stuff will be given to us as needed.

Do we believe that?

How often do we become distracted when we fear and worry about the future (where anxiety is located) and take matters into our own hands?

Jesus makes the case that our worry (more often than not) stems from our lack of belief in Father-God's faithfulness.

We don't trust God to provide or to help or to keep us safe!

We start to think 10 steps down the road – obsessing on what ifs – as if knowing all of them would allow us to control the outcomes – would then eliminate worry.

But here's the problem: we never know all that we need to know, and so we waste our time sorting our racing thoughts that often go nowhere and lead to despair – and this - at the expense of being present to the beautiful now.

It's as Author/Pastor Tim Keller once said, "It takes pride to be anxious... I am not wise enough to know how my life should go."

And Tim was a really bright guy!

Do we trust God with our future so we can remain present today?

The Old Testament tells story after story of God and his relationship with the Israelites. God always keeps His promises. He provides and protects and rescues the Israelites time and time again. Yet, again and again, the Israelites fall into anxiety and doubt and fear, despite how God continually takes care of them.

As I read through the Old Testament I often find myself surprised by the Israelites for their lack of trust in God, but then I examine myself and realize that I do the same thing.

God has continually provided for me time and time again, and yet I worry. I wonder, sometimes, if God will take care of me, if God will protect me, if God will provide for me.

Sometimes when I worry, I try to take matters into my own hands and fix them myself, instead of praying and waiting on the Lord.

The Lord – who after he preached his Sermon on the Mount – gave his disciples – and so gives us - every reason to believe that he is capable of helping us in our troubles – and willing to meet us in our anxiety – and so he deserves our trust.

Mt. 8-9 chronicle story after story of Jesus helping others: a leper with a terminal illness, a centurion who lost a loved one, Peter's very sick mother-in-law, many who were inflicted with illness and spiritual oppression, a scribe worried about financial security, physical safety for those in the boat with Jesus, two men with demons, tax collectors and sinners who'd lost reputation, a ruler with a dying daughter, and the permanent disability of two blind men.

Jesus cares about the specifics. He cares about what keeps us awake at night. We often lack the power to control outcomes – but God is powerful.

In our anxiety, we tend to focus on the problem, and we tend to take matters into our own hands to fix it – to take control.

And we tend to forget God's faithfulness and power.

Can you recall a time when God provided for you or protected you or rescued you? Can you recall a time when God filled you with wisdom or perfected his power in your weakness? Can you recall stories of God's faithfulness and power?

And do you remind yourself of them?

And do you tell them to others?

By the time Jackie and I got to Bloody Alley in Gas Town for the wedding I was officiating last Sunday night – I was delirious with sickness and fatigue.

Even though I'd had a quick nap, and I was fortified with a goblet of Dayquil and a blast of Dequadin throat spray.

And then we had to climb a set of stairs to the second floor where the wedding was to be held. I was positively woozy!

And yet I knew I'd be o.k. I knew that God's power in me would be sufficient to get me through the ceremony – and then for a walk while they reset the venue – and then for a beautiful and intimate dinner with the bride and groom and family afterwards.

And wisdom and wit enough – in the ceremony - to point the bride and groom and their witnesses to the right spaces to sign the certificate of marriage and the marriage register!

God is faithful. God is powerful.

SLIDE 5. God invites me to overcome my anxiety by trusting in His faithfulness.

I'd like to give you some time to reflect on how God has been faithful and powerful in your lives. Some time for you to restore your confidence and faith in Him or a time to simply sit with Jesus in gratefulness.

I'd like to play a song for you during this time of reflection – *Every Faithful*, by Bryan McCleery. You should have a copy of the lyrics (I left one on every other seat this morning). It has been a very encouraging song for me in times of trouble and doubt and anxiety. I hope it will serve the same purpose for you.

And to that point – you may be facing a specific trouble that has caused some doubt and created some anxiety. I would like to invite you to turn to Jesus and ask Him for help – or as the lyric goes – to keep your eyes on Him.

E V E R F A I T H F U L

SLIDE 6. Let me leave you with **2 practical ways to manage your anxiety as a follower of Jesus Christ:**

1. Pray.

2. Serve Others

1. Pray

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Phil. 4:6).

Do not be anxious – about anything. Why? Because God is faithful and powerful – and for you, not against you (Ro. 8:31). This isn't to say that we should be careless or lack concern when it's needed. It means we can live without anxiety or fear or worry – because God is with us.

This being true – then – we can turn to God in prayer – asking God for what we need because He is God and thanking God for who He is and what He has given us. This is the Christian prescription to manage anxiety in all areas of life.

This doesn't mean followers of Jesus will live a worry-free life. So, be gracious with yourself. Nor does it mean that additional help won't be required – like counseling, like exercise, like eating well, like getting good sleeps, like worship. It is just to say that prayer is a good place to start when we are feeling anxious.

2. Serve Others

Because our thought patterns of fear, worry, and anxiety tend to focus on the problem we face, refocusing our minds and energy towards serving others impacts how we manage our anxiety. Anxiety tends to paralyze, isolate, and cause self-doubt. But we can regain a renewed sense of confidence, hope and purpose for our lives when – with a heart of compassion and a will to love others - we focus on others vs. fixating on our problems.

Serving others pulls us out of our spirals of anxiety – and propels us into ministry and back on mission.

So – to recap:

1. All of us – feel anxious from time to time.
2. We don't need to worry, though – because God is faithful and powerful and with us.
3. So, we can turn to Him in prayer.
4. And to each other to serve.

And so manage our anxiety!