

## Finding Peace in the perfect storm

A psychology professor was giving an oral test to a student. Speaking about anxiety, she asked, "How would you diagnose a patient who is screaming at the top of his lungs one minute, then sits on a bench weeping uncontrollably the next?"

The student replied. "Is the patient a hockey coach?"

Text: "Do not worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are going to clothe it. Surely life means more than food, and the body more than clothing...can any of you for all your worrying add to your length of life? If God clothes the grass in the field...will he not much more look after you, people of little faith? Set your hearts on God's kingdom first and these other things will be given as well. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own." Jesus.

This is one of the most exalted and well known passages of Scripture. It seems at first simple and clear. We get it. The message is don't worry. God will look after us. If we get our priorities straight then we will move into flow for our lives and we will be faithful and happy.

But hearing this text and knowing that it is the right thing to do doesn't seem to translate into our living does it? Sure we can hear this text, realize its profundity but basically our lives go on precisely the way they did before we came across this teaching. How sad!

Do you find yourself anxious today? What are you anxious about? Is it the economy, dismal world news, a health challenge or a relationship going sideways? Perhaps for you it is feeling uncertain about your future? Or perhaps you find yourself grieving a loss and you are wondering how you will manage alone?

We have, fortunately, very strong direction from Jesus about anxiety. He tells us that we are not to take *anxious* thought about tomorrow. Sure, it's okay to take thought, to plan and to have foresight, but he says that we can get to the point where we have no need to be **anxious** about tomorrow. Jesus equates anxiety with having little faith. So, if we are anxious today, we apparently have a faith problem...

How do you start your day? Do you begin with God? Do you pray to begin your day? Do you read something uplifting that will help you get through your day? What do you do last thing at night before sleep? Do you meet with God?

Are you feeling heavy about a situation you find yourself in? Alan Cohen, who wrote a great little book called Dare to be yourself says there is one infallible criteria, we can use to figure out whether we are looking at our situation with a clear mind. Can we laugh about it? If we can't laugh about it, he says we can be sure that fear has gotten a foothold and clouded our ability to see the bigger picture.

He says nothing is so bad that we cannot rise above it. He says that we will know when we are healed about a situation when we can laugh about it. It further means that when we release our judgments about ourselves and others, we can laugh about them."

If we are sad, we are making a judgement. Cohen says: "Forgiveness and laughter walk side by side; where we find one, we will find the other." Have we laughed about our judgments yet? Are we there yet? Have we laughed at ourselves?

Two Prime minister were having a meeting together. An aid came in fuming and fretting and ended up pounding the host PM's desk. "Peter" said the PM, "Kindly remember rule number 6." Peter was completely restored to calm, apologized and withdrew. About twenty minutes later

the PMs were interrupted again this time by a woman staffer, who was hysterical with anxiety. Again, the host PM said “Marie kindly remember rule #6.” Calm was restored and Marie withdrew with an apology. A third interruption occurred and was settled in the same way. By this time the visiting PM said “I have never seen anything as remarkable as this in my life. Would you be willing to share with me the secret behind rule 6?” “Very simple” said the host PM, “Rule number 6 is, ‘Don’t take yourself so seriously’.” “Ah!” said his visitor, “that is a fine rule.” After a moment of pondering, he said “and what may I ask are the other rules?”

“There aren’t any.”

Does fear come about because we take ourselves too seriously? Or is anxiety a natural state of the mind? Is it something instinctive that comes say from a survival instinct?

Scientists say we have two brains: The reptile brain and the forebrain with its front right and left cortex.

An animal trainer I saw on television said, that If we were to feed chicken meat to a crocodile *very slowly*, it would appear docile, but if we were to move suddenly there would be an instinctive reaction and there would be a snap of the jaws and we could be armless.

But we humans differ from the crocodile because we have the front lobes of the brain which are supposed to be an evolutionary advantage, which will restrain the reptile brain, where it is argued fear springs from. Now I am not going to debate the science, because I think that our brains are integrated to a great degree. That said, St Paul talks of a struggle within himself, between what he calls the flesh and the spiritual man who lives inside of himself. He says “The things I want to do I don’t end

up doing, but the things that I don't want to do I end up doing them.” Then he concludes that only his faith in God and Jesus can deliver him.

An Old Cherokee was talking to his grandson and he said “Son on the inside of every person a battle is raging between two wolves. One wolf is evil: It is angry, unforgiving, jealous, fearful, arrogant and into judgment. The other wolf is good. It's filled with love, kindness, humility, self control, and does not take offence.

“These two wolves are constantly fighting” the grandfather said.

The young boy thought about that and said “Grandfather, which wolf is going to win?”

The grandfather smiled and said: “Whichever one you feed.”

Joel Osteen in his great little book *Become a better You* says : Feeding unforgiveness, impatience, low self esteem and other negative traits will only make them stronger... Ironically, when we complain, we feel a sense of release. It feels good to feed those negative thoughts. But that wolf will always want more. He says, the next time we are tempted to complain we need to ask “Do I want to feed this negative habit?”

He says that if we will start feeding peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, humility and self control we will see these character traits developing in our lives. He says that 90% of our behavior is based on habits. And unless we do something about our negative habits, we are going to end up less than our best selves.

But the good news is this, according to psychology studies: a negative habit can be broken in six weeks. He says that in order to do this we will have to discipline ourselves, suffering through the pain of change, until new healthy habits are formed.

Personally, I have come to the conclusion that fear is a bad habit that can be changed, depending on which wolf we feed.

What is the very opposite to fear according to this teaching of Jesus we read this morning?

Faith.

Jesus teaches this to us this time and time again. St. John adds that the person who fears has this challenge: They are not made perfect in love. Why? Because, *Perfect love casts out fear.*

There is a lot of anxiety in people's lives today. It could be a health concern, a possible job loss, a dip or disappear in our finances, a relationship that is troubled. It could be the world, climate change, our children's future...what are you anxious about today?

When Jesus was out in a boat in a storm on Galilee the disciples shook him awake fearing for their lives ...

How did Jesus bring peace in that situation? *Because He was at peace inside Himself. Now in what situation was he peaceful?*

**He was at peace in the very center of the storm! He was so peaceful that He was actually asleep!**

God doesn't take away the perfect storm of difficulties, heartaches and unfair things. But **God can take away the anxiety.** There is a mighty promise for those in the center of the perfect storm. "My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives, give I unto you. Therefore, don't permit your hearts to be troubled, don't let them be afraid."

There is a popular song that goes like this:

Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the water  
Put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the sea

Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently  
By puttin' your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee

When the man from Galilee stood up in the boat in the center of the storm and said “Peace be still!” There was a great calm. And he can do the same for you today!