

*January 31, 2016*

*Psalm 71:1-6:* ***“About Being Anxious”***

*I. Realities.*

*II. The Plea.*

*III. Dependent on Him.*

*IV. Continually.*

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Avenue  
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Psalm 71:1-6

Dear Friends in Christ,

Peggy Noonan is an American author of a number of books on politics, religion and culture. She is a weekly columnist for the Wall Street Journal. In her book, *What I Saw at the Revolution* (New York: Ivy Books, 1990), she told a story about a teacher who was trying to impress upon her students that winter had come and they should do everything to avoid colds. Here's the item I read concerning her story:

She decided to emphasize her concern and told about what happened to her little brother years before. Simply put, one winter day he went out with his sled and stayed too long. Consequently, he caught cold and then pneumonia. He died three days later.

When she finished the story, there was total silence in the room. The teacher thought she had really impressed the class with the importance of being careful when a voice in the back asked, "Where's the sled?"

Here's one definition for the word *anxious*: "characterized by extreme uneasiness of mind or brooding fear about some contingency: worried." The boy in the story was anxious about a sled. One would think he would have been anxious about the boy who died. The things that get our attention and cause us to become anxious are interesting. And so, our direction this morning . . .

## **ABOUT BEING ANXIOUS**

### **I. Realities.**

I've always been fascinated by the fact that many observations made years ago are not only ignored by many but, with time, have become even more profound. Solomon said it best: "There is nothing new under the sun." (Prov. 1:9b) Here are four observations.

First, Dr. Danilo Ponce, Professor Emeritus at the University of Hawaii made this observation some 30 years ago: "Today we are over-informed about problems we can do little about. And many studies have shown that feelings of helplessness and hopelessness depress the immune system and make us vulnerable to many ailments and diseases." We're anxious about many things. Most are beyond our control.

Second, Arthur C. Clark, noted science fiction writer and futurist long ago observed, "This is the first age that's paid much attention to the future, which is a little ironic since we may not have one." That, too, was an observation made around 30 years ago.

Third, Guy D. Newman, former president of Howard Payne University stuns us with this thought: "Man's knowledge has surpassed his wisdom. He is afraid of what he knows." How about this: A chip in your cell phone, your credit card, your car, your computer, your 8 foot by 10 foot surround sound TV and everything about you can be recorded and tracked. You know, George Orwell was more prophetic than anyone imagined!

Fourth, the and best statement of them all, comes from a book entitled "Anxiety in Christian Experience" written by Wayne E. Oates. It was written 74 years ago. Oates observed:

When man, as in the case of economic anxiety, sets his heart upon the security of the temporal (the earthly), succeeds in grasping it, and depends upon it for his ultimate satisfaction, this very satisfaction turns to ashes... Economic anxiety is the conscious expression of a deeper and more diffused kind of anxiety over the shortness of life, the set end of man's days."

In other words, our anxieties are symptomatic of what one man - hit with the news of a terminal illness - expressed to me quite some years ago: "Pastor, I'm gonna die!" Well, can you recall the old Jerome Kern song, "Ole Man River"? Remember the words, "Tired of livin' and scared of dyin"? Isn't that it? "Livin'" gets tough - but it seems to be a better option than "dyin'". So we run and grab and grow anxious because life is short and sweet. Well, Scriptures are very sobering, you know? In the 39<sup>th</sup> Psalm David cries out, "Surely a man goes about as a shadow! (Here and gone)...man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!" (Ps. 39: 6)

## II. The Plea.

And that brings us to the first verse of our text from Psalm 71: "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame!" (vs. 1)

It's not that difficult, is it? We run and look to everyone and everything - leaders, "How To" books and excursions, inner determination, you name it - we run and look to everyone and everything for answers, but our ultimate answer and help are in the Lord.

In His discourse on the coming end of this world, Jesus said, "'But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares (anxieties!) of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.'" (Lk. 21:34) Three things will happen to us if we fail to take refuge in the Lord. First, dissipation. To dissipate is defined as: "to cause to spread thin or scatter and gradually vanish...to spend or use up foolishly...to be extravagant or dissolute in the pursuit of pleasure." How about wasted time in pursuit of pleasure? Second, drunkenness, which has been described this way: "In all the turmoils and the convulsions of the world, as already in all common distress, men resort to drink to drown their troubles." It would appear that drug abuse falls into the category. Third, cares or anxieties which Webster defines as "an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked...by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it." Or, better yet, doubt in God's plan and activity for this world and the individual's life.

Our text points us in the right direction: "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame!" Thus, the importance of verse 2 of Psalm 71:

## III. Dependent on Him.

In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me, and save me!

You do understand that God rescues and delivers us from sin, death and hell because of the faith He has given us; faith in Christ Who has rescued us from sin, death and hell by His suffering, hell and death for our sin. You do understand that, right?

You do understand that, contrary to the multitude of TV preachers and assorted heresies, Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation." (Jn. 16:33) And the first disciples gave clear warning to the church for all times with these words: "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) You do understand that, right?

And you do understand that after Jesus said we would have tribulation in this world He went on to say: "But take heart; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33b) The world isn't really running its show. Everything - everything! - is being directed to Christ Who sits above all things - being directed to "a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" and, then, **The End**. Thus the Holy Spirit reveals, "we (His people through faith in Christ) will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:17b,18)

How about this: Instead of getting overly worried and frightened by this world's foolishness and Godlessness and growing violence, vulgarity and hatred - how about we understand, remember and carry with us what Jesus said will happen, instead of deceiving ourselves into the thinking that humans will overcome their problems. Humans never, ever have and they never, ever will. Again, as Jesus said:

“...you will be hated by all for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another... lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matt. 24:9-13)

If you don't like those words - if you want to run away from those words .....well.....if you run away then you loose everything. Forever. And so, we take with us that 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of our text:

#### IV. Continually.

Be to me a rock of refuge, to which I may continually come; for you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

This isn't hard. You don't need an advanced degree to understand it. God, in Christ, is our refuge. We can continually run to Him in prayer and Scripture study. And He continually presents Himself to us in Word and Sacrament.

And note well that one statement, “you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.” If we believe and confess that Jesus Christ is our only and absolute payment for every sin; that He will never fail nor forsake us; that He is our Good Shepherd Who leads us; that His love for us will not falter or change but see us through all things.....if we believe, we have the love and true life that only the Triune God can give!

These are the truths we need to apply to our anxieties.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott