

OCTOBER 5, 2025

# Marion weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON *Anxiety Matthew 6:25-34, Joshua 7:10-13*

The past weeks we have been doing messages based on feedback from the congregation. Speaking to what is going on in your hearts in the moment is important and so we have sheets for you to drop suggestions into the offering plate or the office box. Today the suggestion is the subject of anxiety.

Anxiety is a very real issue today. In the world we live in, there is a lot going on that provokes it in us. Before we get into it, defining anxiety is going to be important.

You will likely here me lump together anxiety, worry, and fear. These are different and yet also very related to one another.

The anxiety we will be addressing is largely what I'll refer to as "typical" anxiety. This as opposed to "clinical". The things that apply to typical also apply to clinical, however clinical tends to require more intense action.

Typical anxiety is anxiety that the majority feel. It raises to a certain level, it is brought on by somewhat predictable things, and lingers for a reasonable amount of time.

Clinical is different. This is anxiety that spikes well higher than typical. It can be unpredictable and paralyzing. It can last for inordinate amounts of time. It is often the result of things like a significant trauma in life, or a chemical imbalance in the brain itself. Fortunately we have people skilled in helping us work through experiences that cause this through different therapies. There is also medication that can be used to balance the brain or bring down the anxiety. The goal is to get the anxiety to a typical place so it can be managed more healthily and easily.

What does scripture tell us about anxiety, worry, and fear?

As a strong foundation we have passages like Matthew 6. "Don't worry about tomorrow. Today has enough to manage on its own. Look at the birds? They are fed. Look at the fields? They are beautiful. If you are more important to God than these things how much more will God care for you?" Then comes the famous verse to "seek first God's Kingdom and righteousness and then these things we need will be added to us."

Paul in Philippians says to be "anxious for nothing, but go to God in prayer and make your requests." 1 Peter says to "cast your cares on God for God cares for you."

In other words, lean on God. Talk to God. Know that God loves us and only wants the best for us. Leaning on this relationship and understanding can bring us calm and peace. It doesn't mean everything gets fixed. It does mean that we can face it with a clarity, a calm, and a confidence that might escape us if we let our anxiety, worry, or fear become overwhelming.

I'd suggest also that we remember that most often God works through people around us. Relying on those God has put in our lives that we trust and we know care for us is a present and real help in times of anxiety. Frequently those people can offer wisdom, encouragement, and support that helps bring peace into the moment. Lean on God. Pretty simple.

Some in Christianity would say that it's just that simple. In fact that it says not to worry or be anxious means that to experience anxiety, worry, or fear is to sin. Or at least it demonstrates a lack of faith or faithfulness. Fortunately this is not accurate.

God created us. These emotions are part of our wiring. They wouldn't be there if there wasn't purpose for them. As with all things, the trick is to make proper use of them. Let them bring out the Godly in us.

Anxiety, worry, and fear help us to make sure we're prepared. They push us to be sharp because a situation demands it. They are signs that we have proper regard for the gravity of a relationship or a situation.

If you come home to a wide open front door that you know was locked and shut when you left there is going to be anxiety. This is good. It means we'll enter the situation with caution until we know it's safe and resolved.

Getting ready to go to court, or a job interview? Anxiety, worry, and fear are normal. These are important moments that require preparation and being sharp to handle the interaction at our absolute best hoping for the best outcome.

Asking someone on a date or proposing marriage? Anxiety is normal. These are big moments with potential and possibility. We want to be at our best.

When we go to the doctor with a pain or symptom anxiety, worry, or fear is natural. They make us more attentive to the doctor. If something is wrong hopefully they make us more likely to follow doctor's orders and have a better chance of healing or cure.

It's normal. In fact it's so normal I spoke about it here not terribly long ago in the life of Jesus.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus sweated blood. You don't do that when you're calm. He was anxious, worried, and scared about what was about to happen. Of course He was! Anyone would be. Anyone should be. It's why He asked if there was another way.

If Jesus was sinless, then these experiences of anxiety, worry, and fear can't be sinful. What happens next actually gives us an encouraging truth.

Even though He asked for another way He was willing to do whatever was necessary. Even if it was the one thing He didn't want to do.

His anxiety, worry, and fear didn't reveal a lack of faith. It gave Him an opportunity to demonstrate just how deep His faith was.

That's how it is for you and I. When these emotions come on us we can respond in a way that is, or isn't, faithful. Their presence doesn't say a thing about our faith. How we handle them says everything about our faith. Let's take a look at three different situations in scripture and we'll see a "three bears" kind of sorting out in how their anxiety, worry, and fear was handled.

Abraham had a situation come up not once but twice. That he handled it the same both times meant he didn't learn the first. As he, his family, and his entourage journeyed they came across a king. Apparently his wife Sarah was a lovely woman. Abraham's anxiety was through the roof because he thought the king would kill him to take Sarah for his own. So he told the king that Sarah was his sister.

Some gloss it over with "well technically she was his half-sister so he didn't really lie". Yes he did. His purpose was to deceive. It worked and the king took Sarah home with him. Next disease and other problems befell the king's household and people. When the king figured out what was going on he brought Sarah back and was upset at Abraham's dishonesty and the resulting problems that he and his people endured as a result. He returned Sarah and allowed them to go.

Abraham's anxiety, worry, and fear caused him to panic. He then liked and literally handed over his own wife. His faith failed him. A lot of people who hadn't done anything wrong suffered as a result. This happens to all of us when we allow ourselves to become overwhelmed with anxiety, worry, and fear.

We make rash or poor choices and often many more than just ourselves are affected.

The next situation is having too little anxiety. Adam and Eve had received direct instructions from God about not eating from a tree in the garden. They were given a clear consequence if they did. For some reason it didn't seem like there was a lot of hand wringing going on when they were tempted. They gave in surprisingly fast. And once again, a lot of others bore the consequences. Not just a king and his people like Abraham, all humanity.

Adam and Eve could have done with more anxiety, worry, and fear. Perhaps if they had it they would've made a different choice. As the story goes, for whatever reason, they didn't have sufficient anxiety, worry, or fear to help them make the right choice.

A lack of anxiety, worry, and fear can be just as much a problem as too much. We often refer to that as entitlement. Folks have enough luck, power, influence, or wealth to not bear consequences for action. As such they grow to feel rules don't apply to them. Then life is lived with abandon and choices are made in the interest of self that hurt countless others. No consequence means nothing to be worried about. No consequence means anything goes.

It breeds attitudes that fly in the face of the faith we are called to have through Christ.

Then we have the third situation. This is David. I'm not going to pretend David did everything right. He didn't. In fact you can see through his story that the times he turned to God he did right far more frequently than those times where he acts with no note that he'd talked to God at all.

Note that we're right back at the first, foundational point. Talk to God. When he did his compass was much more dialed in.

David's experience with Saul is an experience of managed anxiety, worry, and fear. He had enough respect for the situation and Saul's role and authority to not just run arrogantly headlong at him. His anxiety promoted strategy. How does he stay alive and also stay faithful? Part of this faithfulness was that no matter what anyone else thought, David refused to harm the one God had anointed before himself as king.

David ran for a long time, with many adventures. His anxiety, worry, and fear was useful to not make rash choices that would have ended him. As a result he survived, rose to kingship, and that he continually went and returned to God earned him the reputation as "a man after God's heart."

David's story brings us to one final point illustrated by Joshua.

Joshua in this story is now the leader of Israel. As they are conquering Canaan they enter a battle where God tells them not to take certain items as plunder. Naturally a man named Achan does it anyway. As a result most anxious moments, when we handle them with God and in a Godly way, lead to the next best chapter.

God's favor is removed from Israel and where they were having a great string of victories now they were struggling and failing.

Joshua is praying. Once again, a foundational piece of managing anxiety faithfully. God's response is one of my favorite in all of scripture. Joshua is frustrating and confused, and naturally anxious, worried, and fearful. God tells him to STOP praying, get up and go do something. God actually gives Joshua a plan to ferret out Achan and restore God's favor.

Get that? Stop yakking and start doing. The trick is to make sure what we do is in keeping with God's desires and Spirit.

This is something that, for me, has always been a great relief in times of anxiety and fear. It brings some sense of peace. Don't just worry. Don't just talk about it. Do something.

What can be done is different in every situation. But as we've noted before, praying for a hole is good. It helps to pick up a shovel. Most times the answer to whatever is eating at us involved us acting in some way shape or form.

For example, let's say I'm worried someone is mad at me. I talk to someone, "hey, do you think so and so is made at me?" The answer might come back "I don't know, why don't you talk to them?" I could do that, or I could not do that and just spend weeks wondering and worrying. I could make the relationship more awkward or even do something that DOES make the individual angry because I'm being weird and avoidant out of my own anxiety.

Or I could talk to them. Follow that sage advice. Put it to rest and move on with life.

God's advice to Joshua is solid. Do something. No matter how small. At least there is the satisfaction of knowing we're making progress towards settling the matter at hand.

Talk to God. Take comfort in God's love. Lean on one another. God puts us together for a reason. Recognize that there is a use for these feelings of anxiety, worry, and fear. Then take hold of them so they don't take hold of you.

And do something towards resolution.

I think one of the things we forget is that the authoring of the story of our life isn't written by one author. Some put it entirely on God which can feel out of control. Some feel like God's spectating and it's all on us. That can be overwhelming and lonely sometimes.

In truth we are co-authoring this life. We seek God. We seek direction, strength, and purpose. At the same time we aren't inactive. We have decisions to make. We have work to do that God isn't doing for us. It's work we do in conjunction with God. Together.

Like any book, there are those who contribute to the story. They might not make the choices or write the pages but they do influence things.

Maybe remembering this is the greatest key to dealing with anxiety. It's honest and it accounts for the fullness of the witness of scripture. We belong to God. We are not alone. Remember this and let it take down the temperature when life gets to be too much. Collaborate with God and those God places in our lives. And do something. Move forward.

Because whatever chapter you're on right now, the story isn't done yet. Keep to mind that sometimes the most anxious moments, when we handle them with God and in a Godly way, lead to the next best chapter.

#### BIBLE STUDY Mark 4

As we've seen so far, this chapter once again has a theme. It's important to note that the entirety of the chapter weaves together. We frequently dissect it into the segments that many translations separate out with headings. A birds eye view gives a much more informed sense of what is going on.

This chapter is about parable and about Jesus preparing His newly formed group of followers for ministry.

First is the parable of the sower. I'm going to break this down very summary in light of who Jesus is speaking to and combining it with the overarching idea of the chapter.

The seed is the Word of God as Jesus explains shortly after when the disciples are in a private conversation with Him. The message here is that as much as the message might be life giving and necessary, not everyone will receive it. No matter how committed they are to the mission, they have to enter it knowing that many if not most people will reject them and the message. Don't get discouraged. Why? Because the ones who do receive it will continue to multiply the effect of that message in greater numbers.

Even the disciples don't get the meaning at first. This begins the theme that will continue to the end of the chapter as Jesus almost scolds them for their reaction to a storm as they cross a sea. They are fairly thick headed. They will frustrate Jesus a good bit. We know that later they will understand what He is about, but it's not fully until after His death and resurrection.

They don't get it so He has to explain it to them. Keep this in mind. Many prosperity gospel preachers will substituted money for the Word of God as the seed and their own personal ministry as the soil rather than the heart of the person receiving the Word. It is a manipulation intended to make their money, promise the giver a "30, 60, or 100 fold" return on their investment, and when it doesn't materialize blame the lack of faith on the part of the giver. Jesus gives the meaning clearly here. And it is intended very much to give the disciples a realistic view of their journey ahead.

The "have ears, let them hear" along with an Isaiah quote is another hint to them. There will be those who have no desire or ability to hear the message. They are so entrenched in their own understanding that anything that goes against or in addition to it is unthinkable. After all, you don't question your faith right? It was good enough for how long so what's the point of entertaining anything else?

Christianity has this same issue today. It's been around long enough that believers are so indoctrinated into their way of believing that anything that speaks against it, even from other Christians, can't be heard. Even if it is correct. When heaven and hell are on the line, that makes it hard to break from lifelong understandings. All of us entrench in places where we are wrong sometimes as a result.

What about the ears to hear though? These are the curious. The disaffected. These are the ones who ask the questions and see contradictions in what is said vs. what is done. The ones who want to make sense and for whom "just believe" isn't enough. For these people there are answers. There is faith to grow. There is a relationship with God to pursue.

This is why Jesus teaches them and why He tells them about the lamp under a bushel. While for the moment there are "secrets" because people don't know, the point is to lay all of those secrets bare. The point is to bring everyone into the loop of what is good and into the Kingdom of God. The disciples will be the messengers sent out by Jesus. They need to know what the parables mean so that they can pass along the truth to those curious ears that want to hear.

As the chapter progresses we see the short image of planting, not knowing how the seed grows, but just knowing that it does. Once again, this is hopeful for the disciples. They will teach and preach. Some will accept. Others will not. They likely won't ever know why. All that is important is that some do, and they grow and mature until they are ultimately claimed by God as a harvest.

The mustard seed(note we are still on seeds and symbolism as the Word of God has not changed) finishes this teaching lesson. The Kingdom within us begins small and grows. We see in the story the beginning and the end. What is this? It is potential. The potential of the seed is to build an enormous, strong faith and Kingdom both within the person and without in the world.

In that Kingdom, in that ministry, like the birds nesting, many find shelter, peace, and protection.

When we minister we live in the potential. That potential might not always be realized but it is always present. We keep pushing so that wherever faith might take root it has the chance to realize itself.

Important to remember is that we may never see the potential realized. That's okay. Our job is to do our job. Sometimes we'll be the one to start the journey by "planting the seed." Other times we'll be the ones tending and "watering" by encouraging and walking with someone on their journey of or towards faith. Whatever our role we embrace it because we see the inherent potential.

The scene quickly shifts to the boat going across the sea. The storm kicks up. The disciples are terrified. Jesus is sleeping. They wake Him and He calms the storm with but a word. There are a few things here.

The common aspects as a stand alone story are about faith and identity. Jesus' authority and power are made known. Who could do this but God? One more affirmation that the Messiah had come.

Then faith. The disciples were afraid even though they were in the presence of the Son of Man. There was no need. Jesus is revealing His mission to them. Do they really think that ship will drown all of them before Jesus' mission is complete? Do they really think they have to worry when they are in His presence? It is a story of faith and the reliability of placing it in Jesus.

There is one more sense here, however.

The next story places us in the Decapolis, or Gentile territory. They are travelling from Jewish to Gentile with this message. What would they be expecting? Conflict. A storm of a much different nature. Going into that territory would have been fraught for them. If you read ahead you'll see the story of the demon possessed man whose spirits, read that plural spirits, are put into a heard of pigs.

It's not just about the storm of the sea. It's about the storm in their hearts about transitioning from familiar to unfamiliar territory. From friends to enemies. From those who see them as kin to those who see them as riff-raff. Jesus is also letting them know that they needn't be afraid. He can calm that storm as well. He is here to ultimately bring peace between these two peoples.

This is a much more practical and imminent sense for us. I've yet to hear someone legitimately control the

weather by speaking to it, even in faith. At the same time I have heard countless stories about people in a storm of life, and through prayer and faith their hearts and spirits were calmed. This enabled them to endure the time with greater clarity and grew their faith.

Was this a historic event? Sure. Did it mean more than that? Absolutely. Mark uses it for a reason here. It's about much more than controlling choppy sea. It's about letting Him calm stormy hearts amidst troubled situations.