

Philippians 4, 4-8

Do not be anxious about anything - a tall order!

An online poll undertaken by YouGov in 2018 revealed that in the year previous 74% of people had felt so stressed they have been overwhelmed and unable to cope.

It's very easy, isn't it, when listening to other people's problems to say "don't worry - it'll be fine, you'll be great etc etc" but are we any good at taking that on board ourselves. Well I know I haven't always been able to, but, by the grace of God, I feel I'm getting better! And of course, we are reminded this morning by the apostle Paul aren't we that we don't have to deal with our anxieties on our own.

Now I have always loved reading - I remember my mum saying when I was younger "you can never have too many books". She was right! However, many of the books I've read, mainly fiction, although managing to transport me off to another place, someone else's lives and situations for a while, have not necessarily stayed with me or made any real lasting impact on my life. Yes, I wanted to be sent to Mallory Towers to school where Enid Blyton painted such a fun time for all the children who attended; I probably dreamt of becoming a teacher in the idyllic village school that Miss Reed described in her books; I may even have wondered what it would be like to be involved in solving some complicated crime as many of the famous detectives have done under the pen of Agatha Christie, Colin Dexter etc, but none of these fantasies have made any real difference to me as a person. I can even claim to having read Tolstoy's tome War and Peace from cover to cover but ask me to share any of its content and I'm afraid you would be faced with a wall of silence - I can't remember a thing!

You have probably guessed where this is leading - to the Book that I can't claim to have read from cover to cover but the book which keeps me going back, delving into new bits, re-reading familiar bits and gradually understanding the messages within. A book that I keep buying more copies of, have come to depend on. Of course, I am talking about the Bible. Every bookcase should have one!!

Ok, let's get back to our passage. Paul is telling us not to be anxious about anything but to take everything to God in prayer while at the same time being thankful to Him. Now as many of us will probably know, me included, trying to cope with restlessness or anxiety on our own is no mean feat. This is exactly why we need to remember Paul's words and take everything to God, no matter how trivial or how great. We must remember that we are never alone.

We hear Jesus saying many many times "Fear not" or "Don't be afraid". For example, in Chapter 6 of Matthew's gospel we hear Jesus saying, "Therefore I tell you do not be anxious about your life". He goes on to demonstrate that if birds and other creatures don't need to worry about where their next meal is coming from then we, being even more important to God, certainly shouldn't worry as we

can trust that He, our gracious and loving God, will provide for us. This doesn't of course mean that we can just sit back and wait for everything to fall into our laps.

Of course, we have to work at our lives and build our futures. But as Christians we can do this, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and with our eyes fixed firmly on Jesus and the promises God has made to us through him.

Our anxieties are often based on the future - how am I ever going to do that? I won't be able to face doing it, I'm worried what people will think, I just can't or what will happen if I'm not around to care for somebody or I can't see a way to sorting my finances out. There are so many things that we worry about, often quite reasonably, but, if we keep going back to our Bibles, remember to always pray and talk to God about our worries and anxieties, we can then start to feel a little less on our own with our problems.

As Christians we can also encourage and help each other with our anxieties, in fact we are called to do so. To encourage surely means giving courage to others and we can assume that there must be an element of fear there first so by going back to our bibles and praying regularly we will be reminded that it is now easier to encourage, to say those words, don't worry, all will be well, because Jesus has said so and Paul is reminding us of that truth in our passage today. Remember in Matthew Chapter 8 when the disciples were terrified of drowning when the boat, they were in got caught in a storm? Jesus said to them "why are you afraid, ye of little faith" and of course he halted the storm, and they were safe in his hands. So are we. My own reminder of this is a prayer card that I keep on my dressing table mirror which reads "Lord help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today that you and I together can't handle" which I see each morning before going out. If I am particularly worried or nervous about the day ahead, it goes in my pocket, hence its crumpled state!!

We are told that as disciples of Jesus we will face tribulations - just as he did. God has called us to live this life, but Jesus says trust me with your life. We must trust God for and with our whole lives or as R C Sproul, an American theologian says "we must immerse ourselves in the word of God" - yet another reference to the importance of reading our bible and engaging in a regular pattern of prayer. Sproul goes on to say that "if we are estranged from God, we are restless".

In verse 7 of our passage this morning Paul talks about the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding saying that this peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. I am reminded here of what we are told in the 1st verse of the 14th chapter in John's gospel when following his crucifixion the risen Jesus is talking about the many rooms in his father's house and the place he is preparing for us there. He says to his anxious disciples "let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me" and later in verse 27 of that same chapter "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid". These verses give me

goosebumps! What an amazing promise that we really don't need to worry about the future, Jesus has it all under control - he has gone ahead of us to get everything ready and one day will come back and take us to our eternal home with him in paradise. Paul's reminder to us of the peace of God and the fact that it does, in many ways, surpass our understanding is again really comforting - we aren't expected to be able to understand or know everything that God has in store for us - we are merely to trust in him, in his sovereignty and control over our lives.

Paul's final instruction in our passage comes in verse 8 where he tells us that what we have learned and heard from and in him we must now put into practice. How are we to do that? Well to start with we must learn to apply what we read and hear through the word of God, to ourselves and then be proactive in encouraging others.

I remember my first history exam at school - I came out with a mark of 8% - oh dear! However, by the time I moved further up the school I was lucky enough to have a history teacher who was so passionate about her subject that it couldn't help but rub off on her class and I along with the other students went on to pass my O level History and then took my A level in the subject. As Christians we need to have that same passion for our subject - God and what he has done for us through Christ Jesus. Only then can we really pass on and encourage others by the truths that we have learned and trust - we don't need to know it all, we can't possibly understand it all but our love and passion for God and his word should encourage us and in turn help others.

Whilst writing this talk and thinking about what to say, I was having one of my most difficult weeks at work with several problems and issues to address. I really did feel myself turning to our Lord in prayer as I faced the different situations, saying Lord, come with me, help me to say the right thing here. I was able to meet the challenges that the week threw at me with more confidence than I might have previously. Why was this? I firmly believe it is because I have tried to become more disciplined in my own bible reading and prayer and am learning to trust God more and have been encouraged by other Christians, not least all of you and the rest of my wonderful church family here in Bingham. But it's hard isn't it - when faced with difficult situations to always remember that we are loved and protected by our Saviour. But remember we must!

So, can we all live by Paul's reminder that the Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So, to end I'd like to share some words from a prayer of St Augustine "O Lord thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee".

Amen.