

Sometimes people ask me after a sermon, “Were you thinking of me when you were writing?” I feel like you were speaking directly to me, talking about me. 99% of the time, the answer is No. How could I know who is going to show up on any given Sunday, and why would I focus thoughts on one person? No, preachers take a topic or scripture verse and run with it, usually trying to *avoid* making any specific connection with specific people ... especially if the topic deals a need for making changes! Often, sermons deal with what’s going on with the preacher him or herself! So it is this morning; something really stood out to *me* in Psalm 4 of the lectionary. It has a wonderful promise from God, or *trust* in God ... “In peace, I will lie down and sleep, for You alone Lord make me dwell in safety.” Getting a good night’s sleep is not an easy thing!

But before mentioning more personal aspects of rest and stress, I can’t help but think of the thousands of people around the world who might just laugh at this Bible verse. On the front lines of war, who can even think of getting 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep? Or even hundreds of miles away from front lines, many can worry day and night about incoming bombs! I often think about soldiers and civilians in bombed cities... when I take a hot shower, when I can have hot tea or coffee with just the kind of sweetener I wish, when I put on a pair of clean socks every day! We know that war is insanity... as we sang last week: “Cure our warring madness!” ... no one should have to go through constant worry and fear, the trauma of war, the feeling of kill or be killed! PTS, post traumatic stress, is a real thing, and we will need to be alert in upcoming years to all ways that we can help U.S. veterans and other refugees from war.

Now, back to personal stresses of those of us in non-war zones. Unfortunately, much of the world culture now is go-go-go,

following the lead of computer technology... faster speeds needed, to download more stuff! The information highway has hidden dangers! It is indeed a highway, with multiple lanes of information, many megabytes, needing more and more bandwidth to keep it coming and going onto our laptops and smart phones, and even smart watches! It can quickly reach overload, and be very stressful! How many of us say before bedtime... "Oh, I better check my emails or my texts one more time!"

At the risk of being self indulgent, or perhaps feeling the duty of a public figure, let me share a bit of my own recent experience dealing with stress. I woke up a few weeks ago on a Saturday morning at about 5:30 feeling like I was missing breaths, took my own pulse, and felt like I was missing heart beats also, and felt a little heavy in the chest. 5:30AM? Was I worried about something? Ah, maybe I was a bit worried about the sermon I had not written yet for the next day, family Sunday. What's to worry about? The topic was that Jesus told parables about *seeds*. I've probably preached on that theme dozens of times! What's the worry? So I wrote a short sermon from about 7-9 in the morning, then went over to the Thrift Shop, and who was there but Jane and Martha who happen to be nurses! I was honest about feeling heaviness in my chest. Naturally Jane has a blood pressure cuff handy in a side room.... But they made faces while taking my blood pressure, so in short time, I was on my way to urgent care, who then sent me to a hospital, where I was monitored the rest of the day! You know the rest of the story: As one of the causes was said to be *stress*, I was told to take it slow and easy for awhile, so Lynn read my sermon the next morning!

How do we lower stress and thus be able to lie down and sleep in peace as the writer of Psalm 4 promises! One key may be

in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus asks, Why do you worry? Look at the birds and look at the flowers. God feeds and clothes them! Why are you anxious about tomorrow? Let the troubles of the day be enough for that day!

A little more on my recent experience: I made the suggested appointment with a cardiologist. Naturally, I saw a P.A. first; he looked at all the data and thought no immediate changes in treatment or medicine were necessary. BP dropped back to normal and EKG's were reasonable. But the reason I'm sharing all this is what happened next. The cardiologist on call for the day came in and I told re-told the story about not having done my sermon yet for family Sunday and was probably worrying about it Friday night! Well, then this large man, probably in his 60's himself, after discussing my lab tests briefly, put his hand on my shoulder and proceeded to give me a sermon! ... *"Do you think you have control over everything that happens in life? Any one of us could be here today and gone tomorrow! I know because I have some heart issues myself! ... I believe in God; We need turn things over to God, with faith, with trust. I can tell you are rather anxious inside. Why are you so anxious? Let go and put faith and trust in God! One of my favorite stories of Jesus is when Jesus says do you believe that I can heal your child? And the father of a sick child says to Jesus, 'I believe, help my unbelief!'"* (Another way of saying that is, I have faith but help me have more faith!) The cardiologist was saying, in essence, *"Come on, preacher, have a little more faith!"* (It's natural to have questions, doubts... I recall the great Dr. James Forbes saying in a sermon: "Believe it yourself, Jim!") I'm not convinced that God controls every little thing in our lives (If God did, there would not be "warring madness" everywhere! We have plenty of free will), but I totally agree with the cardiologist that WE are not in

control of everything. I'M certainly not in control of the future of Belleville, nor how everyone will hear my sermon efforts! We always have to let go, and see how God, and Spirit work things out.

So, that Sunday I had to put more faith in God by putting more faith in other church leaders, who led morning worship quite well! I had to do the same with other sick days this winter. I have had to let go, let God, and then watch on Zoom the wonderful things that happen here when 2 or 3 are gathered in Jesus name! And... I *am* spending a bit more time in prayer and meditation, feeling better all the time! After all, in one healing, Jesus did say to his disciples: this healing can only happen with *prayer*.

So what better way to close than with Jesus' own words about birds and flowers? The flowers do not toil and spin (they do not worry!) and yet Solomon in all his glory was not clothed with the beauty of one of these! Jesus points to the beauty in the world; if Jesus were here today, he might be leading a tour of flower gardens, or leading a birding tour with Audubon society. The birds we see returning and the flowers now blooming are indeed exquisite; they make us marvel, stand in awe, of the worlds of Creation, nothing that humans beings could have ever dreamed up or controlled in a laboratory. The world of Nature is always a chief reason to say prayers of Thanks, Awe, and Praise. Then of course we pray for the work of God on the hearts of humans, to stand up to evil, and to show more love to others, see the beauty of others and make peace with others. We must live with faith and trust in an ever present God of caring and healing love, who helps us lie down and sleep in peace. We need "more faith," faith that the strongest force for change in the world is love, and faith that we can find goodness and beauty everywhere. Amen.