

## Calming the Anxiety Monster

We live in strange times. How's that for a statement of the blindingly obvious?! The less obvious question is how do we approach this? I went to sleep last night feeling anxious. I woke up this morning with the anxiety monster straining at the leash. I have found the same words coming to mind again and again in these last few days, often in the wee small hours when I've been digesting my own stomach with worry. I have found reading them over slowly, learning them and then chewing over them in my mind, immensely helpful. They come from St Paul's letter to the Philippians, a letter he wrote from prison, at a time when there must have been moments when he wasn't too sure which way was up. Sound familiar?

*'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.'*

The more I have pondered these words – the more I have found the anxiety monster becoming calming down.

First, Paul calls for an attitude of rejoicing – which seems insane, given he's in prison. Such an attitude seems weird for us given our current situation. Let's park that objection for a moment – and look at the rest of his words before coming back here. Paul counsels an attitude of gentleness. As I think of this I see pictures in my mind's eyes of empty shelves, of people with their elbows out in 'I'm alright, Jack' mode - fear and selfishness acting out. Gentleness, kindness, generosity – these are the qualities which bring balm to the anxious mind, the troubled soul, and which will build up resilient community

Then Paul asserts 'The Lord is near.' I'm trying to imagine how you might read these words as a person who has not encountered faith. What does it mean? I read it as 'the one who knows you better than you know yourself, who offers you deep and profound loving friendship, is right here, at your side'. No need for social distancing in this relationship. Jesus is present.

Given that, Paul says, 'do not worry about anything'. This is a bold statement, one based on trust that we can turn to Jesus and articulate all our fears, without filter, knowing we are heard. This is not a magic wand to make the crisis go away, but a genuine resource for everyone to cope with what occurs in the midst of trouble. Here lies the possibility of finding peace in the eye of the storm. Paul promises that 'the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' This is a peace beyond human understanding. That is the basis for Paul's call to rejoice in the Lord. He is not counselling sticking your head in the sand, also known as strolling up Snowdon pretending that nothing is happening, nor is Paul advocating the illusion of self-sufficiency which we see leading to stockpiling. He is saying rather than fear what you face, trust that we are not facing it alone.

Padre Kate

A Prayer for all those affected by Coronavirus

Keep us, good Lord,  
under the shadow of your mercy.  
Sustain and support the anxious,  
be with those who care for the sick,  
and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may find comfort  
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love  
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.