

Before I begin, I want to be sure you know that the Alexandria City Council unanimously approved our redevelopment project yesterday. Quite a few of you were there for all 4.5 hours of its deliberations, and I thank you for that. Our Bishop, by the way, sends his joy and gratitude for our vision and our pursuit of making that vision a reality. He asked me to share his pride in Church of the Resurrection and what we have accomplished, so far, together. I wanted you to know this, because after the service we are going to celebrate, but right now I want to talk about something very different: the anxiety that can go along with a project such as ours.





I was all set to let our lessons lead me into leaving our fishing nets today to follow Jesus. And that’s certainly the place we want to end up: following Christ Jesus.

But as I began to live into this week, with its endless coughs and ills and meetings and preparation for yesterday’s City Council hearing and our Vestry Conference, I began to notice that our individual and collective anxiety level had risen dramatically. Or maybe it was just MY anxiety level that had risen beyond measure.

I don’t know why. There never was doubt, much, that City Council would nix our affordable housing project yesterday. After all, it had already appropriated the nine million dollars needed for our project by raising our City’s tax rate to a near record high. And if our project was tagged out, wouldn’t God give us another mission to do? Isn’t Christ Jesus always walking near, as he did in today’s gospel lesson, inviting us to follow him?

Yes, yes. I know of all the maneuvering by our neighbors and others. Yes, I know about the money worries, given the two-million-dollar reduction in low income housing tax credit funding this application cycle. But, these things are in God’s hands, aren’t they? This is God’s project, isn’t it, not ours? So why worry?

As I pondered these questions this week, I soon realized that **THESE** are the things that **hired hands** worry about. You know, the people who James and John left in their boat with their father, to tend their worries, while **THEY** left all behind and followed Jesus.

Hired hands worry about things; that’s their function. Hired hands are like renters, those who borrow God to deal with the calamities of life. On the other hand, owners—those who rely on God, those who have put their whole trust in God, have faith rather than fear or its low-level manifestation: anxiety.



Now, I’m aware that I am speaking, by and large, to a whole room full of “owners.” You’ve already left the boat, so to speak, and have long been following Jesus. See, owners come to church each Sunday, even if they needed a visit to a chiropractor to get here. Owners tell others about following Jesus. Owners share the hire hands’ burdens when their anxieties about life become overwhelming.

And the hired hands ARE highly anxious. Anxiety has reached record highs worldwide, especially in the US, especially among those born after 1980. In our country, 18 percent of us have an anxiety disorder, and 8 in 100 of all people in our country suffer from crippling anxiety—we are the most anxious people in the world! Curiously, the people in Nigeria, for example, are almost three times less likely to suffer from anxiety, even though their standard of living is six times worse than ours.

These data have led to speculation about the cause of our anxiety epidemic. There are two theories, not mutually exclusive.

The first theory is that our increase in the time spent online is alienating and isolating us from each other in ways that count. Healthy face-to-face relationships share our anxiety burden. This theory could explain why our young suffer the most from anxiety.

The second theory is that our culture has shifted away from having goals that are wholly internal to us—related to our own development and based on finding meaning. Instead, we have chosen goals focused on material rewards and focused on other people’s judgments. This is a theory of Jean Twenge, a psychologist at San Diego State University, who thinks this shift could cause us to feel out of control, producing anxiety.

There are spiritual consequences to such a change in thinking. If we know there is a power greater than ourselves (God!) who made us and knows us and loves us and is in control, and we place our trust in this power, we are bound to be psychologically healthier than if everything is up to us and we are judged on the things we have, what we earn, and the image we project.

When we rest secure in God, we are complete in the knowledge that everything is not all up to us. The Good News is that God is in control. We just have to do our part. I'm sure, that when Peter, Andrew, James, and John stepped out of their boats that first time, they didn't know all they were in for. They learned to heal people, while making the Pharisees very upset. They walked on water, and sometimes they sank. They learned that even fierce storms and eventually death itself were nothing to fear, if they were following the right person.

Along the way, I'll bet they learned about anxiety, and that the opposite of anxiety is faith. And I'll bet they learned that community helps. The "cure" for anxiety is giving over the fear to God, giving over the situation to God. Isn't that what our Psalm today speaks of? Our Psalm declares:

For God alone my soul in silence waits,

truly, my hope is in him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation.

my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

Where will following Jesus lead us this year? I don't know, exactly. I'm beginning to get a glimmer, since City Council approved our affordable housing mission yesterday. All I know for sure, though, is that I don't want to be a hired hand, and I don't want to let my anxiety about where we might be headed get in the way of making the only trip in life that truly counts: the one in which we follow Christ Jesus.