

Life is full of uncertainties. It is full of the unknown. We simply do not know what our future will hold. And I know that that sounds kind of obvious, like it's something that we should just automatically know. But it is still something which causes us to be anxious. And I don't mean just the feeling of anxiety, that emotional feeling that we sometimes get. Because some people are just worrywarts. Some people are just naturally a lot more anxious than others. What I'm talking about, Christians, is that we are all anxious in one way or another. We all wonder what exactly the future is going to hold for us, which leads us to ask questions like: "Well, where are things going? Are they going to get better? Are they going to get worse? What's going to happen in the days ahead?"

And honestly, a lot of this anxiety, Christians, comes from that worry-machine, that worry-factory that we call the news. Because the news causes us to have all kinds of anxieties about the future. Just in preparation for this sermon, for example, I went to a website that I typically use. It lists out the headlines from all the major news sources, so you can kind of get an overview for the day. And I just took note of what kinds of stories were listed there. Some of the stories were talking about war: the war in the Ukraine and how that's supposedly going. Some of the stories were talking about disease. There were still some that were talking about the coronavirus, even some talking about monkeypox and what that might possibly bring. Some of the stories, of course, were talking about the economy: the fact that we're dealing with inflation, the fact that we're dealing with raised prices, and all those shortages and stuff like that. Even dealing with the president saying that we just have to accept these things as part of living in this society. And of course, there were the random stories of horrific murders in various parts of the country. All of it combined to create a very negative picture of the world. And because we have such a negative picture of the world, that causes us to wonder about the future. Is there going to be more of this, or will it be something different?

And honestly it even happens with things that the news wants to tell you are bad. Just think, for example, how the Supreme Court overturned Roe vs. Wade. That should be a cause for rejoicing for us as Christians, that this significant step has been taken in our country for the sake of life. But if you listen to the news, you'd think it was the worst thing that ever happened. I even saw news articles talking about things you can do in states where abortion will soon be illegal. And so it presents even these things in a very negative light, because it wants us to be anxious. It wants us to worry. Because that's what sells, Christians. That's how the news makes their money, how they get you to come back to see what kind of stories they're going to have tomorrow. And spending a lot of time in that kind of news can make us very anxious about the future.

But it's not even just what they're reporting that makes it cause anxiety. It's often how they report the news. Because think of it this way: the average news story on the television is less than two minutes long. But most of them are even less than that, some as short as thirty seconds or less. They're expecting you to take in all of that information in the space of just a couple minutes. And they don't even give you time to think about it, to really react to what they're saying before they move on to something else. So they talk about war, for example. Now we're talking about disease. Now we're talking about inflation. Now we're talking about murders. On and on and on, all in the space of under an hour. And when we're dealing with that kind of information, especially tragedy, it really takes us a few days to process it, to think about what it is that we've heard. And it can affect us for months or even years afterwards. But we're supposed to take all of

this in in the space of an hour or less, and then come back and do it again tomorrow. Is it any wonder that we're so anxious when the news is presented to us in that way?

And all of this becomes something very personal for us too, Christians. That feeling of anxiety comes over into our personal lives, so that we're left with a lot of questions. What's going to happen if? What will I do if? How will I deal with rising prices? How will I deal with gas being as expensive as it is? How will I deal with these troubles in the nation, if they come to where I live? What am I going to do if this happens at my job? What if? What if? What if? And all of those questions don't really have answers. And because of that, we become very anxious, thinking that we're somehow all alone in this. That I'm the only one who's struggling with this, that I'm the only one dealing with these problems. So we're left uncertain, asking, what will the future bring?

So what, then, is the answer, Christians? What should we do to deal with this anxiety? Peter gives us an answer in our reading for today. He does not say, "Just deal with it," as if all we needed to do is just have a stiff upper lip, buckle up, roll with the punches, whatever it may be. Just deal with it, and that's how you get through it. That's not what he says. Nor does he say that, "It's all going to be alright," as if it's some cheap hope that we have that things will sort of even out in the end. That's not what he says either.

What he says is in verse 6: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you." The answer to our anxiety, Christians, is to humble ourselves, because it is our pride which causes us to be anxious. Let me say that again. It is our pride that causes us to be anxious. And I know that sounds strange. We might think: "What does pride have to do with anxiety? How do those two things work?" But Peter tells us it has everything to do with it. Because our pride leads us to do one of two things, Christians. Our pride either leads us to try to take everything into our own hands, to deal with our problems all by ourselves. Or it leads us to think that the future is somehow up in the air, that it's uncertain, that nobody really has any control over it. And both of those things cause us to be anxious.

Take the first one, for example. Pride many times leads us to try to take things into our own hands. To say that I'm going to deal with my problems. The future is what I make it to be! So I've dealt with these hard things in the past. I will deal with them again, and I'll get through them, just as I've done time and time again. Because I can rely on myself. When things get a little too hard, well, then I can go to God. Then I'll ask him to help me. But before that point, I'll deal with it myself. But how far does that really get us, Christians? How far does relying on ourselves get us through our problems, thinking that we'll just deal with most of it and leave everything else to someone else? Almost all of the things that you hear about on the news are things that you can't do anything about, even if you wanted to. And most of the things that you deal with in the course of your life are things that you can't do anything about, even if you wanted to. And if we only go to God as a last resort, is it any wonder that we're so anxious? We treat God like a panic button, the kind of thing I only hit when I really need him. But that's a very man-centered way of approaching the future, because it puts us into the center. It puts us as the one who tries to deal with all of these things. And when we can't--and we often can't--that makes us anxious about the future. That's what pride causes us to do.

And on the other hand, pride can also lead us to treat the future as if it is something totally random. It could go this way. It could go that way. If I do this, then this might happen. If this happens, then that might happen, and so forth. It's all unknowable, we think. It's all something totally being made. The future doesn't really exist yet. And God at best is kind like a weatherman. He can predict what's going to happen, and he knows it pretty well, but we might think that he's just as in the dark as we are. But that's also our pride speaking, Christians, because it turns God into something less than what he is. It turns him into someone who's just as clueless about the future as us. That's our pride speaking, and it makes us anxious for the future.

But Christians, the future belongs to God. It's his. Nothing in it happens apart from him. As Psalm 139 tells us: "Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." God has established every single day of your life. From the day you are born until the day you die, God has created each and every day. And they all belong to him. So there is no surprises to God. There is no making it up as we go along. All of your days, the future has been written into his book, and it will happen just as he wants it to go.

Proverbs 16 tells us: "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." Though we may plan our own way, plan our days to do what we want, it is God who causes these things to happen. Without him, there is no future. Without him, all of our plans would come to nothing. We wouldn't even have today without him. But with him, we have a future, because in him all things come to pass.

And Ephesians 1 tells us that: "In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." God chose you, Christians, to belong to him even before he created the world, even before you even knew he existed. And if the future was something totally unknowable, if the future was something totally up in the air, how could that possibly happen? But it isn't up in the air. God knows exactly what will happen, and each and every day comes just as he intends them to. And they will all come to an end in his good time.

So yes, Christians, this is why Peter calls for us to humble ourselves, to lower ourselves into the hand of God. Because when we know that the future belongs to God, then there is no reason for us to be anxious. We can cast all of those cares, all of those anxieties on him, because he cares for us. And it doesn't matter how big the problem may be. It doesn't matter how small it may be. It doesn't matter if it's something in between. All of them matter to God, because he cares for you. And you can go to him in all things, knowing that he can and he will do something about them all.

As Peter says in our reading: "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." So not only can he do something about the future, Christians, he will also strengthen you for the days ahead. Because the picture that Peter uses here is that of a building which has fallen down. And God himself will come and restore you. He'll put everything back in its place and fix it up again. God himself will confirm you. He will prop you up. He will give you a strong and firm foundation. God himself will strengthen you. He will shore you up so that you will not fall down again. And God himself will establish you to give you a new foundation,

one which cannot be moved. Because God will build you, Christians, on the unmovable Rock, that is, himself. And no matter what storms may come, no matter how the winds may blow, and no matter how the waters may rise, the one who builds on that Rock will never fall, because then you rely on God and not on yourself. You rely on God who is over all things and holds our future in his hands.

So let those hard times come, Christians. God is still God. Humble yourselves under his mighty hand, because God will never change. And even if it all comes to an end tomorrow, even if it all comes crashing down, even if the sun goes out, the stars fall from the sky, and the mountains crumble into the sea, God is still God. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God will never pass away. And knowing that why should we be anxious about anything? As Revelation 5 tells us: "Weep no more. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered." Jesus Christ, our Lord, has overcome all things. Jesus holds our future in his hands. And his kingdom, his rule will never come to an end. "To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you hold us in your mighty hand and have ordered all our days. We pray that you would cause us always to trust in you, knowing that you care for us in your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.