

Sermon for Sunday 8 February 2026

Second Sunday Before Lent

**Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3; Romans 8: 18 – 25;
Matthew 6: 25 – end**

Anxiety – and what Jesus says

As I was preparing this sermon, I asked ChatGPT to send me some thoughts on anxiety. It came up with approximately 260 well-chosen words. Here's how it began: "The phrase 'the age of anxiety' feels less like a diagnosis and more like a weather report. A constant low-pressure system hanging over everything." I felt so anxious by the time I'd read to the end of ChatGPT's little essay that I'm certainly not going to repeat it here.

We know that anxiety levels are very high, especially amongst the young – fuelled by 24/7 access to the news – which is rarely good – and by social media. Fortunately, the Bible, and Jesus in particular, has some very helpful things to say about it.

The story of Creation, shows us God calling into being everything that is, and seeing that everything he's made is good. As the crown of creation, he makes human beings, blesses them and gives them dominion over everything else. Finally, he blesses the seventh day, a Sabbath day of rest. Everything is wonderful.

Fast forward to Paul's letter to the Romans, and the picture is very different. Paul says "I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." (Romans 8: 18). For Paul the whole of creation is groaning like a woman in labour and longing to be set free from its bondage to decay. Everything, he says, has been damaged and affected by the disobedience of human beings to God. You don't need me to tell you that we live in a world full of violence, pain and suffering, much of it directly caused by human beings. The good news is that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has a transforming plan which he is working out. Meanwhile, we are

waiting – in the sufferings of our time - for the time when God’s plan will be fulfilled.

In recent times we’ve become very aware of the way in which human beings and our activities have directly damaged our planet, causing pollution, climate change and weather disruption. Sometimes this has been unwitting damage; sometimes it has been the result of human greed. In 2016 a group of scientific experts coined the name Anthropocene for a new geological age which they say started in around 1950 when the influence of people on the planet began to cause really significant change. We have much to be anxious about, especially since human nature itself doesn’t seem to be changing for the better.

But before we go any further - anxiety can be helpful. Deadlines make us get down to work. I know – I have at least one every week – for my sermon! Adrenaline – produced when we are anxious – will certainly be helpful for all of those athletes competing in the Winter Olympics. I have to say that nothing would induce me to hurtle down a bob-sleigh run or shoot off a ski-jump!

And anxiety can make us plan sensibly for the future - plant seeds for food or pay into a pension plan.

But anxiety can be misplaced, and that is what Jesus is talking about in today’s Gospel. Everything that he says is in the context of the verse immediately before our reading: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other; or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Matthew 6: 24).

Jesus shows a remarkable depth of understanding about how we human beings may be governed and dominated – even bullied – by our anxieties. Anxieties which make us take our focus off him and away from enjoying the present moment. For Jesus this kind of worry is centred on food and clothing – the most basic things we need to survive. We may not be as close to facing starvation as those in the first century with no welfare state, but many anxieties centre around our relationship with food – for example eating disorders, obesity or fat-shaming. We certainly

don't lack clothing, but much worry can still be generated by fixations over brands, fashions and logos - especially amongst the young. All of this can be extrapolated out to other things – houses and lifestyle for example.

We so easily confuse our wants or desires – in other words – our greed - with our actual needs.

I want to tell you about someone I met the last time I went to Wales on retreat. He's a Jesuit priest and he was my spiritual director for the retreat. Jesuits are monks and take a vow of poverty, chastity and obedience. They live in community but do all sorts of things in the world. Several times I met this man going out or coming back from walks on the hills. One time I looked at his boots and decided he must be a really serious walker because they looked like really good leather boots. But when we left I noticed that he had hardly any luggage – a really small bag for ten days away. There couldn't possibly be any boots in there, and he wasn't wearing them. He was, as I learned, a really serious walker, but he didn't have any boots. He had relied on the fact

that there is always a pile of boots available for people to borrow at the retreat centre. He really was travelling light and living that vow of poverty.

Jesus says our Heavenly Father knows our needs. If we can truly trust Him and live our lives for him on a daily basis we shall be freed from all of the obsessive and unhelpful things we worry about. We shall be free to live; to enjoy the present moment and all that it brings as gift, because we won't be worrying about the future. We will experience so many ordinary things – and even life itself - as gifts of a loving God.

We will be like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

Amen