

Gold Hill Evangelical Lutheran Church

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**Empowered by the Holy Spirit,
United to Serve**



Montana Synod News

The Montana Synod is curating information and resources on the Montana Synod Website

Click [HERE](#) to be taken to the COVID-19 resource page. There you will find information released by the Synod office, resources, and tools for your congregation.

Update from the Synod Staff

For reopening questions please click [HERE](#) for Bishop Jungling's pastoral letter and addendum on the Synod website.

The Synod office will be closed until May 8th, then open and staffed on May 11th.

All staff travel has been cancelled until at least May 26 unless it's an actual emergency. We don't want to spread anything to you or bring it back to our homes; nor do we want to catch anything and have to stop serving you. So please, continue to stay in touch with staff through email, phone calls, and through the regular Zoom opportunities available to you.

Bishop Laurie

If you need to contact the Synod staff, please consider their email or cell phone. That information can be found on the [Synod website](#).

Words from the Bishop: Worry ... does it work?

"And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" This is the question Jesus asks his disciples in his Sermon on the Mount in a lengthy section about worry. (Mt 6:27) As I hear this question, Jesus seems to be asking an ancient form of Dr. Phil's famous question: "So how's that workin' for ya?"



During these days of Covid-19 and all the changes it is bringing, we spend a lot of time, energy, and resources on our worry, reacting to it, fearing it, managing it. But too easily anxiety can spiral us into hard places, leaving us feeling exhausted and out of control. The more anxious we are, the more we tend to react in ways that end up increasing our anxiety which in turn causes more unhelpful reaction which increases our anxiety...

Anxiety does strange things to human beings, especially if it's chronic. When we're faced with an immediate threat, anxiety can prepare us to meet that threat. In that way, it's a helpful part of being human.

However, over time even a low-grade anxiety, such as wondering about the economy, worrying about getting Covid-19, planning ways to do safe worship, etc., can build up in our bodies, our minds and our spirits, and start manifesting itself in harmful ways to ourselves and others.

When we're in anxiety mode, our amygdala kicks into gear and it's easy to panic. We act in fight, flight, or freeze mode, trapped in emotions of fear or rage, not able to think clearly if at all. High anxiety constricts us, arousing feelings of helplessness, decreasing our ability to learn, and simplifying our thinking into only "yes" or "no" reactions. Then, as we desire to ease our anxiety using certainty, we try to control others by criticizing and blaming them for all our problems. In these anxious states, we tend to demand quick

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fixes and become defensive, fast to stand against and over anyone who disagrees with us.

As the storm descended on their boat, Jesus asked his disciples, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Mt 8:26) It doesn't seem fair, does it? Asking human beings created with a built-in panic button to "be not afraid?"

Yet God continually calls us not to fear or worry. "Therefore, do not worry..." Jesus says in his Sermon. (Mt 6:31, 34) In fact, again and again throughout scripture we are reminded not to fear, not to be afraid, not to worry or be anxious. "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God." God says through the prophet Isaiah (41:10). "Do not worry about anything," Paul tells the Philippians. (4:6) "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you...do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid," Jesus says to his disciples. (Jn 14:27) In fact, God comforts us over 60 times in scripture with calls to "be not afraid."

But how can we *not* worry in this uncertain and frightening time? Is God asking the impossible of us?

Kind of, but not really. "Kind of" in the sense that we can never completely get rid of our anxiety; it is part of our human make-up. God understands that. That's why in Matthew 6:31 and 34, Jesus offers not a command to stop worrying but rather a promised-based challenge [1]: "Don't worry because you have no need to. Instead have faith in the kingdom of God and God's deep relationship with you, and all that you need will be given unto you. After all, God knows that you need these things." (Mt 6:31-34, paraphrase)

But there's a "not really" here too. God isn't asking the impossible of us because in faith and with healthy self-management skills, we have the ability through the power of the Spirit and the guidance of spiritual and mental health leaders to manage our anxiety through Christ rather than through our human abilities which by themselves will too often lead us into unhealthy places.

When we live through our faith in Christ, the "image of God" part of our brain is invoked: the neo-cortex and empathy centers. Empowered by the Spirit, we can take deep breaths wrapped in God's grace when we feel anxious and think more clearly, respecting others and learning patiently through our faith. Living in the peace of Christ, we can listen to our neighbors and better practice love, kindness, and self-control. Filled with the wisdom of the Spirit, we can be curious, flexible, and open to alternative God-fed responses. Brimming with the words of God's never-ending love and acceptance, we can talk sense and good news to ourselves, reminding ourselves and others that God is with us no matter what. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Lk 12:32)

Anxiety, worry, fear - these will never work to save us from anything. Only Christ can do that. So as 1Peter 5:7 proclaims, "Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you."

Always and forever! In Christ's promise,
Bishop Laurie

[1] I know it doesn't read like that in the NRSV but it's an ancient Greek thing.

Montana Synod Covid-19 Relief Fund

Please consider a gift to the Montana Synod Covid-19 Relief Fund for Congregations. If you have resources to share in this time of disaster as a congregation or as an individual, please **make a donation** to the Montana Synod, designating the Montana Synod Covid-19 Relief Fund for Congregations with a check. Checks should be made payable to the Montana Synod. Thank you for your assistance to care for one another here in the Montana Synod. (Maybe your congregation has an Endowment Fund that has monies that could be used to assist another congregation in the Synod at this time?) Thank you for considering a gift to the Covid-19 Relief Fund.

Peace to you,

Bishop Laurie Jungling
Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger

Gold Hill Lutheran Church Welcomes You!

Are you looking for a place to connect with a faithful community, grow in faith, and put your talents to work in serving others? Look no further, we welcome you at Gold Hill Lutheran Church! To learn more about the mission and ministry of Gold Hill Lutheran Church, please contact us at 406-723-4242.

