

## 10/11 WEEK TWO Contagious calm

### **SCREEN: Long Way Up**

I've been watching a reality show on Apple TV called, *'Long Way Up'*.

It follows the actor Ewan McGregor and his friend Charley Boorman on a motorcycle trip from the tip of South America all the way to Los Angeles - a journey of 13,000 miles through 13 countries over 100 days.

That's a long way up!

There's amazing scenery and incredible encounters with locals, but also some anxious moments adding to the drama.

Like the fact that they're riding prototype electric motorcycles that have a maximum range of 150 miles, and riding in zero degree weather, having their motorcycles die on them, and camping on hard, cold ground.

Now, I've only see half the episodes, but what really impresses me is that no matter how challenging the journey gets, Ewan never loses his cool.

In every circumstance he remains happy and hopeful.

And watching him I've thought, *'this is exactly who I'd want by my side in a crisis!'*

Someone who's cool and collected - a calming presence when life gets anxious.

### **SCREEN: Anxious for Nothing main screen**

This is Week Two of our message series titled, *Anxious for Nothing*.

And just as a reminder, this series is based on a book by Max Lucado which I'm borrowing from extensively.

Max's book is based on a passage in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians which we heard at Mass last week.

Paul writes that we should be 'anxious for nothing' and then gives a step-by-step plan for dealing with anxiety.

Each week we're focusing on a different step.

Last week we heard Paul tell us to rejoice always.

Today's focus is this verse:

**SCREEN: Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. -Phil 4:5**

Now, some bibles use the word 'gentleness' instead of kindness.

Both words can imply meekness or being a pushover.

That's not even close to what St. Paul meant.

A note in our Catholic bible says it means to be considerate and patient.

Paul wrote this just before saying we must be 'anxious for nothing'.

So here's how he lays out the steps for dealing with anxiety:

Stay balanced, don't lose your cool, then you'll have no anxiety.

Which is only possible because the Lord is near.

Like all New Testament writers, Paul saw his life as a journey, with a lot of ups and downs, twists and turns.

And yet through it all, Paul had the amazing ability to roll with the punches and to go wherever the Lord led him.

In the second reading today, here's how Paul summed up his 30 year journey as an Apostle for the Lord:

**SCREEN: I know how to live in humble circumstances;**

**I know also how to live with abundance.**

**In every circumstance and in all things**

**I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need.**

**I can do all things in him who strengthens me.**

*Ups and downs, twists and turns - I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

The life of every disciple is a journey of discovery -

finding out that we belong to Christ,

and going wherever the Lord leads us.

Like Paul, we should expect to face

some incredibly anxious moments -

times when a crisis comes out of nowhere.

When that happens, we have a choice to make.

We can react by running around in circles,  
screaming ‘the sky is falling!’ **or**

we can embrace kindness by remaining calm, cool and collected.

Easy to say, but how do we do that?

Well, like Paul, when anxious times come, we profess this truth:

**SCREEN: The Lord is near!**

Paul was able to meet every challenge

because the Lord was near - was at Paul’s side every step of his journey.

When he was rejected and thrown out of towns, the Lord was near.

When he was stoned by angry mobs, arrested, accused of blasphemy, the Lord was near.

When he nearly drowned in a storm and was shipwrecked, the Lord was near.

When his friends abandoned him and he sensed the end was coming, the Lord was near.

He never doubted for a second that God was with him and would deliver him.

His faith in God was the source of Paul’s strength.

These are truths we must always keep in mind.

So when you face really anxious moments, hear Jesus say to you:

*“Don’t worry, I’m at your side and I’m not going anywhere.”*

Last week I encouraged you to make time every day and  
name 5 reasons you have to rejoice.

I want to encourage you to keep doing that every day.

It’s a really simple spiritual practice, but it has the power to reframe  
how you see your circumstances.

Focusing on your blessings reminds you that ‘the Lord is near’ and always will be.

St. Paul was a very devout Jew.

Before he became an Apostle, he was a Pharisee.

I have to think that when he prayed he turned to the 23rd Psalm,  
which we heard today:

**SCREEN: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

Even though I walk in the dark valley

I fear no evil; for you are at my side

with your rod and your staff

that give me courage. -Ps 23

Consider keeping this psalm with you and pray it whenever you're feeling anxious or afraid.

Here are some other ways to find peace and calm.

### **SCREEN: surround yourself with calm believers**

First, you need believers at your side who are calm in a crisis.

Why?

Because their faith and their calm can be contagious - you can catch it!

When I think of a calm believer, I think of my friend Kevin, who's a pastor in the city.

We've known each other for 25 years.

Since the pandemic began, we've been getting together for dinner every week....

I'll see him this Sunday evening.

Beyond the meal we share, we help each other figure out how to pastor our churches through a pandemic.

There are two reasons I turn to Kevin in a time of crisis:

First, he is solidly grounded in his faith and second, he is calm, steady, and even keeled.

He's my 'go to' person in anxious times.

Who is your 'go to' person when a crisis comes out of nowhere and lays you flat?

When a family tragedy strikes, a health scare breaks,

a work disaster explodes, or a money worry crops up - who do you turn to?

I doubt it's someone who's first reaction is to run around shouting, "*the sky is falling!*"

We all know people who love drama and crisis - who seem to thrive on anxiety!

And they can be entertaining for about a minute.

But let's be honest, they aren't very helpful in a crisis.

Your 'go to' person needs to be someone who is both faith-filled and calm, cool and collected.

Who can help you find peace and figure out what to do.

So if you are going to follow Paul's step-by-step plan and be truly anxious for nothing, find a 'go to' believer you can turn to.

And decide to reach out to them first when times get tough.

## **SCREEN: be flexible**

I think another lesson from St. Paul for dealing with anxiety, is that we need to be flexible - to be ready for anything.

To be open to all circumstances and whatever life may throw at us.

It's one of the spiritual lessons I see in the TV show 'Long Way Up'.

When the batteries ran low, darkness fell and the cold settled in,

Ewan and Charlie remained calm because they were flexible.

Disciples can't always see where God is leading,

and sometimes the road ahead is crooked.

But following Jesus requires flexibility

and trusting that God is near.

When you're rigid and unbending - seeing only one direction or one outcome -

I guarantee you'll be more anxious and worried.

None of us knows what tomorrow may bring.

We can plan, but St. Paul writes that we should

be ready for whatever may come.

*Whatever may come.*

So, be like Paul.

Whenever you feel like there's no way up, remember, the Lord is near.

When worries about the pandemic overwhelm you, remember, the Lord is near.

When you're uncertain about the direction of our country or the November election, remember, the Lord is near.

Then you'll be able to face life's challenges with kindness,

knowing that in all circumstances the Lord is near to strengthen you.

## **SCREEN: your kindness should be known to all**

Strive to live like this every day so that

*your kindness is known by all.*

Christ wants you to be a model of kindness so that

others will come to know him through you.

When others see how you handle a crisis,

your calm will be contagious for them.

And like you, they will be anxious for nothing. Amen. +