Good morning, City Church.

You may have noticed on most Sundays, when I begin a sermon, I start by plunging us all into a story together. One of the reasons I do that, is because we are all coming from so many different places and experiences when we come together on Sundays.

Which means it takes us a little while to all get on the same page together- with our thoughts and feelings.

Without a singular story for us to immerse our thoughts and feelings in before we get to the Scripture…some of us will hear the Scripture as ho-hum…or irrelevant…or like its only talking to a certain group of people.

But today, we are living in a remarkably unique time in world history….where things are happening VERY FAST. 2 weeks ago- no one really knew words like “Covid-19” or phrases like “Social Distancing” or “Flattening the Curve”.

Right now, globally…and especially nationally- we are living in a common story that has affected everyone, regardless of age, race, creed, political affiliation or economic status.

America has not seen days like these since WWII, and nothing on this scale as a public health crisis since the Spanish Flu outbreak of 1918.

Mix in unlimited access to 24 hour news, social media, and streaming services- with a collective mind trained to seek entertainment as therapy and outrage as self-expression- and we have probably the greatest cocktail for fear, self-protection, anxiety, and apathy of neighbor- that any of us have ever seen in our lifetime.

And we are all living it together.

For over a year now, I’ve been reading some authors and listening to some wise pastors who have drawn my attention to an idea that has exploded off the pages of Scripture for me, changed some of my approach to how I live as a parent and husband…and how I pastor.

* And today, I want share that idea with you, because I think it will hit home more than ever in this common story of potential fear and selfishness that we are all living right now. (Just look at the toilet paper aisle)
* I’m talking about being what the Rabbi and family therapist Edwin Friedman called- a Non-anxious presence. (By the way, I am indebted to John Mark Comer and Mark Sayers for this idea- the former of which addressed his church with it last Sunday…and I wanted to pass it on to you).
* Here’s the basic idea.
* As a family therapist, Friedman identified this cycle of anxiety, fear, outrage and mistrust that was breaking many families. He went on to apply it to bigger systems like politics and religion as well.
* Here’s how the cycle goes- there are 5 parts.
* **1) Reactivity**
  + So something outside of our control happens to us…and we react to it negatively. Like a pandemic.
  + We become filled with anger…or anxiety.
  + Of course, with ongoing news coverage and social media updates…we can cling to and have endless debate about why we should be angry, afraid or anxious.
  + And…since those emotions are also addictive…they keep us coming back for more…which- in turn…makes advertisers on those platforms very happy because they have your eyeballs.
* **2) Herding Instinct**
  + once we react - we want to find others who are reacting like us.
  + We want to be around them
  + Because we love to hear our outrage or anxiety affirmed and echoed back to us…it makes us feel validated.
  + We start a mob mentality that seeks to justify our outrage or fear.
* **3) Blame displacement**
  + We look to blame someone else for what’s happening.
  + Its the Chinese government’s fault.
  + Its because we didn’t take action soon enough.
  + Its because we are all freaking out.
  + Its everybody else.
  + Ever talk to someone in Murfreesboro right after they drive in the snow? Its so interesting how EVERY BODY else is a terrible driver.
  + An old Alcoholics Anonymous saying goes like this “The only thing better than being right, is feeling wronged.”
* **4) Quick Fix Mentality**
  + We have a very low threshold for pain. Very little endurance, perseverance, ability to long suffer.
  + We live believing that it is our right to progressively get better and better…to distance ourselves from pain and suffering.
  + We live in opulence and abundance.
  + Hungry? You can get any food you want at any grocery store at any time. Regardless of what region or season that food is naturally available.
  + Bored or bothered by silence? Endless entertainment available to you in your pocket, on your computer or television screen.
  + We want quick solutions to complex problems.
  + When a problem comes up, we imagine that its only a Google search or Amazon shopping experience away from being solved.
  + And if DIY doesn’t fix it….just hire someone.
  + Or throw it away and buy a new one.
  + But that does nothing for our underlying mounting emotional problems.
  + Even though as a society we have continually progressed economically and scientifically in the fields of medicine and technology🡪 the myth of progress that we will solve all our own problems and create a utopia has been undercut by the fact that we are emotionally and relationally a very broken and fearful people.
* And that has led to the 5th stage of this cycle..
* **5) Lack of Well-differentiated Leadership**
  + That simply means leaders who can tell the difference between their circumstances and the way they feel.
  + Leaders who are able to say- “Just because you acted toxically toward me, doesn’t mean I have to keep the cycle going by reacting to you.”
  + Leaders that recognize that their identity- their emotional state- does not have to mirror the chaos that may happen to them.
  + We have a lack of leaders that tap into a source of compassion, and wisdom and peace and love in the midst of crazy.
  + And that creates an environment that spawns more and more people with that kind of toxic leadership.
  + So…the cycle starts all over again…as the leaders we have operate in reactivity & herding instinct & blame-shifting & quick fix mentality….and create more folks like them.
* So that's the cycle.
* And what Friedman noticed in his research is that one person could break the cycle. That if one person in a family, didn’t even have to be the parent…but if one person was a source of compassion, peace, and wisdom…if one person could remain calm…while still being active toward a solution. If one person could differentiate themselves from the circumstances happening to them and around them…
* …that in that family…the cycle could be broken…and other members of the family could actually
* THAT PERSON is what he calls a NON-ANXIOUS Presence.
* And that is exactly who Jesus is…and exactly who the Holy Spirit equips us to be.
* So here’s what we’re gonna do. I’m going to read some Scriptures- about about Jesus. Then, I’m going to read an excerpt of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Rome. That shows us what a NAP looks like and how you can become one in a world that is in desperate need of that right now.
* I hope you follow along in your Bible- since this there is no screen behind me- and then I’m going to explain this idea…and then we’re going to see what God is calling us to as a church during this time.
* **Matthew 4:1-4**
* **Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**
* **2 After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 Then the tempter approached him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”**
* **4 He answered, “It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”**
* (POINT- What is evil and ugly and a part of the fall of creation, God still can draw us into- we are sustained in the midst of it with the word of God- God himself makes our circumstances so that we must practice social distancing)
* **Mark 4:35-41**
* **35 On that day, when evening had come, he told them,“Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea.” 36 So they left the crowd and took him along since he was in the boat. And other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher! Don’t you care that we’re going to die? ”**
* **39 He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea,“Silence! Be still! ” The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 Then he said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith? ”**
* **41 And they were terrified and asked one another, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him! ”** 
  + **NAP- Non anxious presence…and Jesus is taking a nap**
  + (POINT- Jesus is a non-anxious presence that is moved to action- But does not REACT- or allow circumstances to define his peace
* ALSO- the disciples fear moved from their circumstances…to Jesus. **Fear God above all…or fear all above God. Fear motivates us to question God’s care for us.**
* **Luke 5:15-16** 
  + **15 But the news about him spread even more, and large crowds would come together to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 Yet he often withdrew to deserted places and prayed.**
  + Jesus, even when the need was very great, when there was much to be urgent about….in a time of upheaval…still withdrew to deserted places to pray)
  + Some of you REALLY want to do something.
  + This happened in the season of lent of pa
* **John 16:33**
* **I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.”**

POINT- The last verse we left off with- God is real about our suffering- he has told us about his presence with us so that we would have peace. In the midst of distancing…we can only be courageous as we know 1- GOD IS WITH US NOW. 2- GOD WILL ALWAYS BE WITH US)

* **Romans 12:9-21** 
  + **9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. 10 Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. 11 Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. 13 Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. 20 But**
  + **If your enemy is hungry, feed him.**
  + **If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.**
  + **For in so doing**
  + **you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.**
  + **21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good**
* POINT- A description of being a non-anxious presence. LET THE SPIRIT BOIL!- Awareness of God’s presence and love THRU reading the Scripture- BEING WITH HIS PEOPLE- and PRAYING- abiding prayers.
* **Rejoice in Hope.**- God has done what is necessary to overcome the world. Hope is sure. Nothing can keep us from God.
* **Be Patient in Affliction-** Suffering has an expiration date. The resurrection tells us that. Not only that, God has co-opted it to use for his redemptive purpose in your life.
* **Constant in Prayer-** Not just asking for things…but practicing God’s presence. Acknowledging OUT LOUD to him that you are not alone…even in social distancing.
* **Share with the saints in their needs-** Depend and lean on your family. Be vulnerable. Look around the ROOM…or the ZOOM. These are the people God has put in your life to practice this with. Lets do it!
* **Rejoice and weep together…and don’t rely on your own wisdom.**
  + This is more relational vulnerability and dependence
  + This is where D-group through a Marco Polo comes in where you are carrying a couple of people in your pocket to reach out and be vulnerable with.
* **Practice Hospitality (welcome the stranger) and if your enemy is hungry feed him. Bless those who persecute you.**
  + A non-anxious presence goes towards the chaos.
  + How can you love your neighbor in this time.
  + The church throughout history has served and loved through plague and famine and economic crisis.
  + So we are called now to a spirit of generosity…not scarcity. OF self-giving…not self-protection.
  + Find out your neighbors needs and seek to meet them.
* You conquer evil with good.- inject a Non Anxious presence into a cycle of dysfunction and anxiety- and evil is overcome with good.
* That is who our savior has enabled us to be by giving us his spirit and setting us loose to love without fear in such a time as this.
* **Practice habits.**
* Habits keep you grounded.
  + Practice those common rule Soul Handles
  + Meals with each other. Figure it out virtually.
  + Don't let the news crowd out your connection with the LORD.
  + Turn the phone off and read Scripture. Be silent. Think about what the Lord has said.
* **Take advantage of the slow down.**
* **Love your neighbor.**
* PODCAST-
* Prayer-