

The First Sunday after Christmas

January 1, 2017

Prayer of the Day: Eternal Son of God, on this day you were called Jesus, a name that proclaims you to be the Savior of all people. Give us strength in the new year to live each day to the honor of your name; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Alleluia! (Colossians 3:15)

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 5:6-7

Ah, the start of a new year. Today the old goes away and the new is ushered in. Today you are reinvigorated with new hopes, new dreams, new expectations. Today you get to start fresh and new— and nothing catches that “newness” quite like hanging a new calendar.

That's what I get to do today— hang my new calendar. You know what's so awesome about that? Nothing is written on my new one. No appointments, no conferences, no family obligations. In fact, I get to start with the month of 'January.' It means I can't flip back and be reminded about all the things that happened. Instead, I only can flip forward and see what I can do— and with all that blank space, boy, what time I have! During winter: woodworking. During spring: gardening. During summer: vacation. During fall: soccer, football, and school. So much potential awaits.

This old calendar, well, it conjures memories of where I've been— and it has been quite a year. Birthdays and anniversaries are marked. I see doctor appointments and conferences. The kids had sports and library dates. A vacation is scheduled in there. I remember some enjoyable days, but there are other days I did not like. I had funerals to attend— yes, funerals to conduct as a pastor, but funerals where I had to say goodbye to someone too. My vacation triggers memories of stress, deadlines, and conflict. The months were busy— and it made summer (my most favorite time of the year) zip by. Yes, today I can throw out the old calendar, with all of its stress, obligations, and pain, and hang up a fresh clean slate.

Still, I can't shake one feeling: Is 2017 going to be better? Did that thought descend into your mind as you watched the ball drop? Did you wake up wondering if life would be drastically different today? You know many enjoyable days lie ahead; past experience teaches you that. You know there will be challenging days— because past experience teaches you that. By the end of 2017, will you have more good days than bad?

I can't answer the question— I wish I could, but I don't know the future. Yet, I can tell you one thing— and it's the same truth God teaches you today: **CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON GOD!** *Grasp his care for you and Humbly live under his power.*

Listen to our reading from [1 Peter 5:6-7](#): **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**

What words for sore ears! God invites you, encourages you, no— he commands you— **CAST ALL YOUR ANXIETY ON HIM!** That's why we memorize this Bible verse— so we never forget it! In fact, this verse is put to a beloved song:

What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!...

(Christian Worship Hymnal #411, verse 1).

Music ties words to memory. Memorizing Bibles passages keeps God's Word on your lips and heart. So, the very instant anxiety flutters into your heart you can fly off to God! Right?

Well, maybe. I can't speak for you; I can only speak for myself. As I flip through last year's calendar, I see anxiety streaking across every month, every week, every day. I can still visualize the heart-wrenching sobs at funerals. My heart ached when I heard about marriage tensions. I kept wondering: "What can I say to set things back to normal?" Doctor appointments are scribbled down; a nebulizer was needed; steroids ordered for a kid. It brings back memories of the "worst-case-scenario." What if the littlest cold leads to the worst of conditions? (Believe me, I've seen illness become something worse). I see "Election Day" circled. In its aftermath I wonder: "Boy, how are foreign negotiations going to look now? ... or my little nest egg? ... or my children's future?" Pastor conferences shared statistics and articles about the growing epidemic of people staying out of church (and worship). Stress creeps up, whispering: "So, what are you going to do to turn things around? How can you do God's job and bring people to faith?"

Maybe your calendar replays similar tears and stress, nervousness and fear. You recall your anxiety; it weighed heavy on you. You stayed awake at night wondering how to solve conflict. You barely got through one day without asking the "What if"-question. You did not know what to do when you listened to FoxNews or CNN or scrolled through Facebook. That anxiety flares up so often and stays so long, doesn't it? Let me ask: When you grew anxious, where did you cast that anxiety?

Did you live 2016 stress-free because you brought every trouble to God?

You know, the verse: "**Cast all your anxiety on him...**" doesn't stand on its own, like some catch-all truth. It goes together with verse 6. Peter actually says in the Greek: "**Be humble, therefore, under the powerful hand of God, so that he may raise you up in time, [live humble] by casting all your anxiety upon him.**" (personal translation) In

order to **CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON GOD**, you have to first understand that stress is something you cannot handle on your own. That's something that rubs against our very nature.

By nature we are self-reliant; we have this feeling we can do what God does. A part of your hearts would actually have you believe that you can control life-events that feel small and insignificant. So, you look up to heaven and say: "God, I can handle this on my own. It's just a standard hospital stay... It's just a little argument... It's just a birth of a child... It's just a little bad habit... I can fix this all by myself." Yet, if you ever felt anxiety or stress, then it means you cannot fix those issues. To puff up your self-reliance only pushes God further out of the number-spot in your heart—the spot where he must be. Your heart will try to finish what we want by nature: to be God... to call the shots... to live life on our terms.

That's why God speaks these words today. We are not God—but God is God. We cannot solve every problem or cure all our anxiety—but God can. So, **CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON GOD!** Why? **...because he cares for you.**

God himself says that. God himself reveals it. Just last week you traveled to the manger and saw God-in-flesh. Jesus trades his throne in heaven for a feedbox on earth. He leaves glorious angels for faulty human beings. He exchanges a domain of singing and enters a sphere of sorrow and tears, anger and frustration. The simple fact that Jesus even entered your world (in the first place) shows just how much he cares for you.

Still, Jesus reveals his care even more. He knows what it is like to sense anxiety. He weeps when John the Baptist is murdered ([Matthew 14:1-13](#)). His heart goes out to those led astray by false teaching ([Matthew 9:35-36](#)). He has compassion on the sick. He begs forgiveness for angry men who nail him to the cross ([Luke 23:34](#)). All through life, Jesus takes one concern after another to God in prayer.

Then on the cross, Jesus unveils the greatest depth of care for you. Jesus had done nothing wrong! Yes—he is innocent of any crime, but it goes more than that. Jesus never doubted God the Father's care for him! He never once said: "I've got this God, I can make this bread and fish feed 5,000 people all by myself ([Matthew 14:13-21](#))... I can use my own efforts to open this man's ears ([Mark 7:31-36](#))... I can suffer the sins of the world by my own power" ([Matthew 26:36-46](#)). No! Jesus **CASTS HIS ANXIETY ON GOD.**

When you see Jesus on the cross, he's not there for himself; he's there for you. He removes your self-reliance and suffers. He loses life so that you can have eternal life! God cares for you so much that he uses Jesus to wrap you in perfection!

CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON GOD! *because he cares for you.* You know God cares for you because Jesus rose from the dead. Easter Sunday declares the guarantee of eternal life!

Maybe we have difficulty tying the resurrection to our current circumstances. We know Jesus rose again for us, but we have lived in world of anxiety for so long. So, how does Easter comfort us?

Have you found yourself stranded for help? A car battery won't start... A ladder is needed... Food is needed... something? You needed help and someone came to help. A battery is jumped. A ladder is loaned. Food is given. This individual helped you in your need.

So, the next time you have a need... the car battery dies again... the garage door is stuck ... the light bill is due, who are you going to turn? To yourself? To a stranger? No! You would ask the person who freely helped once before!

In the same way, look at Easter and continually tell yourself: "For me! Jesus did this for me!" If Jesus took such great lengths to free you from death in hell, why would he not help you now? Why would he let you be crushed under trouble's weight? Why would he not answer you? The devil tempts us to think he does not care for us. Nothing could be further from the truth! God so clearly says: **I care for you**. Not "for people." Not "for the world." He personalizes it: **for you!**

That is why you **CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON GOD!** You *grasp his care*. Here's how you continue **CASTING YOUR ANXIETY ON GOD:** *live humbly under God's power*.

To *live humbly under God's power* simply means to trust God will do the things he says he can do. On own, it sounds frightening to trust. It sounds like we have to muster the courage. But that's not how it works. Your trust grows because God strengthens your trust.

Read your Bible. See how powerful God's hand truly is. It creates—makes something more than a house or dinner— it makes living trees and millions of unique kinds of fish and forms fiery stars. It enforces— unleashing plagues frogs, gnats, locusts on the Egyptians. It draws the shade of darkness. It stops the sun, adding more time to the day. It provides—raining manna-bread down in the desert, transforming two fish and five loaves of bread into a meal for thousands. That is what your God is capable of doing. Can you match that? Can you begin to match it? What joy to know this powerful hand rests over you— not in fear— but in love!

So, you *live humbly under God's power*—putting every concern on him and trusting he is fully capable of handling it. That's why Peter zeroes in on the things that keep you awake at night. He points at every little financial concern— the times your bills go up, the times when your social security stays flat. Peter drags up your every tension about school, high school, and college. He exposes all fear about how your children will grow up, who they will be, what they will do. He highlights any concern you have about your diagnosis and cure. He tells you: "Take them all, package them into a little ball, and throw it on God."

There is nothing too big or too insignificant for God to handle. If God had limits, would he not tell you? Instead, God holds nothing back: **All your cares, cast on him**. When you cast those concerns, they no longer are your concern. The word "cast" is that of "throwing" like a stick or stone. As you walk along a river, you bend down, grab a small rock, and throw it into the water. It will not return to you. You will not go after it. That rock is gone. It's out of mind. You are not worried about it. **CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON GOD!** *Humbly live under his power*.

Take a moment and look through your old calendar today. Thank God for the joys God has given you. Thank God for standing beside you during challenging times. Even though anxiety may have overwhelmed you, God still saw fit to bring you into this new year.

Look through your new calendar today. Do it with confidence. I don't know what the new year will bring. I can't answer the question— I wish I could, but I don't know the future. Yet, I can tell you one thing— and God teaches you this truth today: **CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON GOD!** *Humbly live under his power and Grasp his care for you*.