

1 John 4:1-11

"Listening to the Spirit."

On this date 10 years ago there was much confusion in the world. There was a lot of anxiety and uncertainty. We weren't sure where to go in the world and we weren't sure what it meant to be living in our time and place. We gravitated to leaders on the hope that something good might come forth.

Our early Christian brothers and sisters faced much anxiety in their new faith. This portion of 1 John addresses the confusion that folks faced in their new faith. Their faith wasn't one that was supported by the empire of Rome. Its leader had been executed and yet folks believed and had faith in the resurrection that they could move forward, even in the midst of anxiety and fear.

Just a moment ago I shared what I experienced on this day 10 years ago. I know I was not alone in my anxiety in the world. The early Christian communities were not alone in their anxiety as well. Not only did they have to worry about trouble within their community, but trouble from the outside of the community. In the beginning of our faith Christians were not accepted with open arms, but viewed with suspicion. This no doubt induced anxiety among the early believers.

I believe the anxiety of the early Christians is something that we could relate to, especially in the anxiety of our world. Imagine the anxiety the early believers felt at the death of Christ, the punishing blow that would have brought fear and doubt into your heart. Many people had just witnessed the Son of Man be executed for crimes that he did not commit.

Fortunately, and I believe the word fortunately is a grave understatement, Christ rose up from the dead and conquered death. Many could see and hear that Christ was no longer dead, but

was victorious over the cross and showed us that indeed his words and life were the words and life that we are to listen to and believe in so that we can have everlasting and eternal life.

While the victory over the cross was huge, unfortunately that was not enough to calm the anxiety over being a believer in Christ for long. History tells us that many of our brothers and sisters were held in contempt or died for their faith. Anxiety would begin to run high yet again.

Early Christians were often seen as a strange group of Jews at first, but once the movement spread beyond the Jews and on to the Gentiles, the people outside of the Christian communities began to wonder about these new Christians.

These new Christians rejected the religion of the empire, the religion that glorified the emperor and was seen as a governmental duty to worship the gods so that they might be prosperous. But the religion of the empire was a broken religion, because it was only for the few at the top. While the lower classes were expected to play their parts in the rituals it was only those at the top that would see the glory of their religion.

Christianity broke the mold with this and instead was a faith for the people, for all people, not just for those at the top. The rituals that the early Christians would participate in, such as communion or baptism were seen as acts that went against the state. They were not really Romans and the Romans began to let these people know where their place was.

We've heard the stories of people being killed for their faith, or imprisoned like Paul was imprisoned. The anxiety of being a believer was there and there was many people, many false prophets as 1 John points out, that would try to lead people astray. Giving in to the anxiety would have meant the end of our faith, but many Christians, ignored the false prophets and the feelings of anxiety and instead held true to their faith. They held true to the resurrection and they held true to God and to Christ, and listened to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In our times of hardship, it is easy to turn quickly to those with quick answers and solutions that seem real. I remember how on 9/11 we turned to many different people for guidance, when in fact we should have been turning to God for guidance in such a difficult time. 1 John tells to the community to listen to the Holy Spirit for guidance in order to overcome those with false messages. The early Christians had to rely God to overcome their anxiety, especially in the midst of the hardship of the world, and the Holy Spirit was their guide in overcoming this anxiety.

Another theme that comes about in this reading from 1 John that pertains to us in the midst of our anxiety is the need for us to turn to each other in love. 1 John 7-11 pulls us into the Love of God and the love that we can have for each other. God loved us first and foremost that he sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we may know God. God loved us so much that he did amazing things through his Son that we might have everlasting life and have a transformed life that lives beyond anything we can imagine before we find peace in Jesus Christ.

The writer of 1 John tells us that we are to love each other in the spirit of this love. For when we love God we can love each other. Loving each other is something that we can do in the Spirit of Christ when we face hardship in the world. When we face seemingly unsurmountable anxiety we have God to turn to and we have the community of Jesus Christ to turn to.

Today, we remember those that we have lost in the terrorist attacks and in the wars and conflicts that have mounted since that day 10 years ago. We still have a lot of to be fearful of and a lot to have understandable amounts of anxiety. But I am here to tell you this, we don't have to despair. God loves us and is for us, so that nothing can get in the way of the love that is there for all people to experience.

Jesus Christ came into this world so that we can have a new life. If you are hearing these words about Christ and you want to know more, then we are here to talk with you. As a community we aim to reflect the love of God as found in the scriptures. We are a community of Christ that aims to be a place where you can experience the love of God.

Never let the anxiety of the world overcome you. Rely on God, turn to Christ, and listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the name of the One, Jesus Christ, who came and died on the cross so that we might live, Amen.