Hunter-gatherer groups lived in the gift of the day, like the Israelites in the wilderness. As they traveled to the Promised Land, the Israelites received the food they needed each day. God sent them manna, a bread-like substance, so there was no need to worry about the future. The Israelites learned to trust God and the abundance of their environment and thus, avoided the struggle between productivity mind and leisure mind.

Of course, the Israelites were not always faithful, and neither are we. “If only we had meat to eat!” they complained in the desert. “We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna” (Numbers 11:4-6). Yet, even when the Israelites grumbled, God provided for them, sending manna every day for 40 years, until they reached the Promised Land.

We are not hunter-gatherers, nor are we Israelites wandering in the wilderness. But we can overcome some of the tug-of-war between productivity mind and leisure mind by trusting in the abundance of God. We can lower our anxiety about the future by believing that God will provide for us. Yes, it is true that God wants us to work in the world to meet our needs; but we should also take the time to rest. In God’s design for our lives, work and rest are not adversaries.

Psalm 25 is a prayer which is clearly written in a time of anxiety. The writer asks for help, specifically for deliverance from enemies (vv. 2-3), for guidance and instruction (vv. 4-5), for forgiveness (vv. 6-7), and for relief from distress (vv. 16-18). We might say that the psalmist is feeling the Sunday Scaries.

“To you, O Lord, I lift my soul,” says the psalm-writer. “O my God, in you I trust” (vv. 1-2). The writer senses that the only way out of fear and uneasiness is to turn to God in faith and expectation. “To offer one’s life to God means to trust God amid threatening circumstances,” says Bible professor J. Clinton McCann. “To offer one’s life to God means also to wait for God, to live with hope.” Trust God. Wait for God. Live with hope. That is a good plan, for sure, but so much easier said than done.

The psalmist needs help with this, so he prays, “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation” (vv. 4-5). The psalmist asks to be shown a new way through life, a fresh path, a better approach. The psalmist asks to be taught by God and led in God’s truth, because he believes that God will save him from destruction. In place of the Sunday Scaries, the writer wants a life of health and wholeness based on the promises and provision of God who is faithful.

This should be our prayer as well! Happily, when we ask for guidance and deliverance, we discover that all “the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep [God’s] covenant and [God’s] decrees” (v. 10). God shows us a love that is solid and never-ending. God proves time and again that God is faithful to the promises God makes. God’s Word remains unbroken in every time and place and situation. God offers these gifts to us freely, asking only that we remain in relationship with God and do our best to follow God’s commandments. In short, the cure for anxiety is to focus on God, rather than on our work or our fears. When we do, we find that God provides what we need. We do not have to be anxious about the future.

The Bushmen of Namibia and Botswana can teach us about walking in a new way. Until the late 20th century, when modern civilization destroyed their way of life, these Bushmen had a 37-hour workweek: 17 hours finding food, and 20 hours doing chores. They spent the rest of their time going on walks, teaching their children, playing games, flirting, singing, and dancing. They trusted the abundance of the earth to provide for them, and their trust was rewarded. Instead of feeling anxious on Sunday nights, they told stories around a campfire.

The Bushmen controlled the negative influence of “productivity mind.” They believed overwork by some people could lead to envy and inequality, so they discouraged expressions of personal ambition. When a Bushman returned with a big kill, the tribe took action to control his pride. “We always speak of his meat as worthless,” said one tribesman. “This way we cool his heart and make him gentle.” In addition, the tribe gave credit not only to the hunter, but to the owner of the arrow that killed the animal. That way, several people shared in the success of the hunt, as the community gathered to share the meal.

We are not Bushmen, living in a hunter-gatherer society. Nor are we ancient Israelites, feasting on manna in the wilderness. But we can trust the abundance of God and walk in God’s ways. The Sunday Scaries will end only when we believe that God is working to heal us, help us, provide for us, and save us. We cannot save ourselves by working harder; salvation comes from trusting God to give us what we need for life.

Jesus is the cure for the Sunday Scaries. He reminds us that we cannot serve both God and wealth (Matthew 6:24). He counsels us not to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear, but to “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (vv. 32-33). The tension between productivity mind and leisure mind is relieved when we shift our attention to “kingdom mind.” Focusing on God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness helps the Sunday Scaries fade away.

Jesus came as “the way, and the truth, and the life” for us (John 14:6). He shows us the abundance of God’s steadfast love for us, and of God’s desire to save us from anything that can hurt or destroy us. Although the world will continue to make us anxious, Jesus comes to offer us wholeness and relief from the Sunday Scaries. He is the Prince of Peace.

Prayer: God, I want to be a person who stands firm and trusts You wholeheartedly. I want to be unshakable and resilient, but that can only happen by depending on You and trusting You. Develop that deeper trust in me, God. For the sake of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the world, and for my sake. Amen.

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**Sunday Scaries**

Sunday, November 28, 2021 Psalm 25:1-10

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

It is no surprise that we live in anxious times. Climate change. Political polarization. Rising crime rates. Natural disasters. The economic and personal stresses of the pandemic. We are often afraid and uneasy because there are so many everyday things that make us anxious: News alerts on our phones. Not getting enough sleep. Being overcommitted. An unbalanced diet. Too much sugar or caffeine. Sunday nights.

Yup, you heard me: Sunday nights! “It’s common for people to feel anxious [as] the weekend winds down,” says Dr. Sanam Hafeez. “When your mind begins to focus on reports, kids’ activities, and the long list of to-dos, it’s easy to slip into an anxious state of mind.” The flood of anxiety that many of us feel as the workweek approaches is called the “Sunday Scaries.”

Derek Thompson writes that this anxiety is linked to “the modern psychology of time.” Sunday is scary because we embrace a distinctively modern view of time, with two modes of thinking: “productivity mind and leisure mind.” Monday through Friday we use productivity mind, working hard and showing our industriousness. On Saturday and Sunday, we activate leisure mind, which allows us to rest and play. But on Sunday evening, the two minds merge: we are still in leisure mind, but we are transitioning into productivity mind. The Sunday Scaries arise because we feel guilty about relaxing over the weekend or apprehensive about the workweek that lies ahead.

What we need to realize is that humans have not always had this experience. Research shows that hunter-gatherer groups had little about the future. They “rarely stored food for more than a few days,” says Thompson. “Trusting in the abundance of their environment, [they] worked to meet their absolute needs, and then stopped to rest, rather than planning ahead.”