

Sermon: Sunday, 8 February 2026

Anxious Empires vs. Trusting God

Romans 8:18–25 | Matthew 6:25–34

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*May we hear God's word with faith and open hearts,
that fear may give way to trust
and justice take root among us,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

We are living in a season of tensed-up shoulders and furrowed brows.
The world feels tightly wound.

And sometimes the timing of things feels almost cruel.

On the day before the Church of England marks Racial Justice Sunday, one of the most unapologetically racist social media posts in recent memory emerges from the White House. I thought long and hard about this because it lands not simply as a shock, but as a symptom.

A sign that fear continues to speak loudly in the halls of power. A sign that exclusion is still dressed up as strength. A sign that anxiety still masquerades as authority.

Now, am I going to preach about Donald Trump this morning?
No.

But I am going to preach about what I have come to call **anxious empires**.

Systems, frameworks and paradigms that are bigger than one man or one nation. *Reactions* to what happens when power feels threatened. The *behaviour* of leaders when the future feels uncertain and they have little to no control of the narrative- so they create one. It is about the ancient tactic of “divide and conquer”; to divide the world into “us” and “them”.

We see it in this nation and in nations around the world.

We feel it in institutions, even in the Church.

Two weeks ago, our new Archbishop, Sarah, legally took possession of her new role and this has brought on both celebration and raised eyebrows. Not because God has suddenly become less faithful, but because we- those of us called Christians- are very good at becoming unsettled when the future does not look like the past.

So, it's not only geopolitics that is anxious. It is the human heart.

Anxiety has become a kind of background music that hums beneath our conversations, our scrolling, our arguments, and even our prayers. We carry it in our bodies, in our relationships and in our systems and processes.

The Apostle Paul, writing to a bruised and bewildered church in Rome, bravely names what the whole creation feels: “Creation is groaning.”

Not collapsing. Or failing... but labouring. *συστενάζει* (“sustenazei”, Greek for groaning) with “*kai sunōdinei*” (Greek for birth pangs). Creation cries, not as in a death rattle, but with a sound of hope, as in the hope of childbirth.

The world (κτίσις/ktisis in Greek) aches, Paul says, because the world (the ktisis) knows it is not yet what God intends it to be. I am struck by this choice in word from Paul, because it refers to more than just humanity. It includes the whole created order- the environment, the complex organic systems that sustain all life groans/aches. The Greek word for groans implies an “arching of the neck” or “a forward leaning posture”, much like birth-giving.

And the Church groans too.

Groans over senseless *wars and conflicts*.

Groans over *racism*.

Groans over *division*.

Groans over *apathy*.

Groans over its own *unfinished repentance*.

It's into that groaning world; Jesus does not shout instructions. He simply points.

“Look at the birds of the air. Consider the lilies of the field”. As an act of holy resistance.

Because anxiety, Jesus knows, is how empires train us to live. He saw it in how his own context and upbringing. He saw it in the way his Palestinian people would have been treated by the power of Rome. And I am certain, if he walked those same streets today, he would find it eerily similar.

If you are afraid enough, you are easier to control.

If you are worried enough, you will accept almost anything in exchange for the promise of safety.

So Jesus dares to tell another story. A different story. One of abundance, of belonging. Not of anxious empire, but of the kingdom of God.

Creation groans for that kingdom.

And waits, Paul says, for the revealing of the children of God. I feel both the hope, but also the weight of what all of creation is waiting for- for US- you and me- to STEP UP! To be salt and light. A people who refuses to let fear have the final word. To be mouth, hands and feet of a Jesus who came to gather, to include, to turn our world the right-side-up, to love. To love the world to death. His own death. Literally.

So, it is no accident that today, as we hear Jesus say, “do not worry,” in a world where it feels like it's the only thing we ever do. Because the struggle for justice is, at its heart, a struggle against fear-driven ways of organising the world.

“*Look at the birds.*”, “*Consider the lilies.*”

Birds do not hoard and lilies do not compete. They simply exist inside God's generosity. Inside God's economy of abundance.

At first glance it seems as if Jesus is just being sentimental. When, in fact, he is being deeply subversive. He is inviting his first century listeners and indeed you and me, to step out of the anxious story of empire and into the trusting story of the kingdom of God.

“Do not worry” is a call, an invitation even, to live under a different story.

When I was in South Africa recently, I went back to my home parish, St Clare's in Ocean View, for the first Sunday of my holiday.

It was early morning about 7.30am. The light was still soft. And there, just as she had been for as long as I can remember, was Joyce.

She was sweeping the churchyard. The same slow, faithful rhythm I remember from when I was a child. Back then, she used to sweep before anyone else arrived, long before the bells rang, long before the service began.

I stood for a moment and just watched her.

The road outside is generally dusty. The wind was already undoing some of her work. The world around St Clare's is still visibly divided by wealth and struggle, with large townhouses on one side and council-housing, with all its challenges, on the other.

And yet Joyce swept.

I went over and greeted her with a big hug, "Joyce, you are still doing this", I jokingly said.

She smiled and said, "Yes. Someone must make the place ready."

Not ready for perfection.

Ready for *people*.

Ready for *prayer*.

Ready for *those who are tired of carrying the world*.

While preparing this sermon I thought, this is what Jesus must have meant when he says, "Look at the birds... consider the lilies."

Joyce was not solving the problems of my hometown, Ocean View.

She was not ending injustice.

But she was refusing to let fear and neglect have the last word.

Empires teach us to build walls.

Joyce taught me to keep clearing the space.

Paul says creation is groaning.

But every morning, in that small churchyard, another sound rises with it.

The sound of a broom on stone, making room for God's kingdom.

And I realised in that moment:

while anxious empires shout,

faith sometimes sweeps.

And that brings us back to this time in the life of our Church- the appointment of our Archbishop Sarah. We unapologetically celebrate her ministry and look forward to all she will bring to her role. But we know some who are deeply unsettled. Her appointment has raised both hopes and raised questions. And in that reaction, *we see ourselves*.

Trust is always tested when God does something new. When the future does not resemble the past and when familiar patterns shift underneath us. Ask me, I know a thing or two about trusting God when God does something new.

The temptation in anxious times is to cling more tightly to what feels safe.

But the gospel does not call us to safety. It calls us to faithfulness, my friends.

Paul says that creation waits for the revealing of the children of God.
It is not waiting for perfect systems or flawless Synod motions.
But for a people who live differently.

A people that *refuses despair*.
A people that *refuses violence, in all its manifestations*.
A people that *refuses to let fear have the final word*.

And this is where Racial Justice Sunday becomes more than a slogan.
It becomes the grammar of our Christian hope.

Because where anxious empires decide whose lives are expendable.
the kingdom of God declares that every-body bears the image of God.

Where anxious empires sort people into insiders and outsiders.
Jesus eats with those who were told they did not belong.

Where anxious empires thrives on division.
The Holy Spirit forms a priesthood of believer across our differences.

The Church is *definitely* not the solution to the world's plethora of crisis.
But it is called to be a sign that another way of being human is possible. It is called to be
sacrament. An outward and visible sign and expression of an inward and invisible grace.

A community that does not deny pain. That does not avoid conflict.
But that refuses to be governed by fear.

So today, between Paul's groaning creation and Jesus' lilies and birds, God is asking us a
quieter but braver question: *Who will you trust?*

The anxious empires of our age, with their loud voices and fragile promises?
Or the generous God who knows what we need before we ask?

What would it look like this week to seek the kingdom rather than scroll in fear?
To practise justice rather than suspicion? To build tables rather than walls?

Creation is still groaning. The nations are still restless. The Church is still arguing.

And still Jesus says,
"Look. Consider. Trust."

I am challenged and I hope you are too, that in these anxious times, God does not give us
certainty.
God gives us birds, lilies, and a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

In the words of our beautiful opening hymn: "Be still for the presence of the Lord, th Holy
One is here". **Amen.**