

Irene and I remember stories about living in deeply anxious times. For example:

One of our parents—who will remain unnamed—remembers hiding in a barn while the Gestapo shot and killed every member of another family, including children, also hiding in the barn. They were all in the barn because the Nazis had discovered these families were hiding Jewish people. Anxious times.

One of our parents remembers carrying packages through town, at night, as a ten-year-old. She was told that she was delivering shoes for her father's shop, but she thought these trips strange. At night? And why her? Why didn't these customers just come to the store?

After the war she learned that the packages contained counterfeit identification and ration cards and TNT. Would you send your 10-year-old girls into the Nazi patrolled evening to help the underground? During the day the same grandparents hid young Dutchmen, hiding so that the Nazis couldn't send them to forced labour camps. Here's a pic—poor quality, right after liberation, of my great grandfather, grandparents, an aunt and the two men who hid in the house. We don't remember their names now, but they did go on to have families of their own.

The thing is, you couldn't talk about these underground activities to anyone, not even to the people you went to church with. You didn't know who you could trust. Everyone was anxious.

And at the same time, back in Canada, your parents followed the progress of Canadian troops into the Netherlands fighting bitter battles for the Scheldt, the Rhineland, the Zuider Zee and Groningen. Your parents, and their uncles, and their cousins were there, boots on the ground, sailing Corvettes, and in the air. Those were anxious times for all Canadians.

It's hard for us to remember that. We were just kids, or not yet born. So, what we'd really like to do, today, is have a barbeque on the patio outside the sanctuary and talk about the surprising Blue Jays or disappointing Maple Leafs. However, in a small but yet significant way with COVID and the nation mobilized to overcome it we're getting a taste of what it was like for our grandparents and parents, in wartime, aren't we?

Listen: More than 9,000 Canadians have already died of COVID—before the second wave. That's already more than the 7,600 Canadians who died liberating the Netherlands.

Of course, our battle is not against Nazis, but a virus. Our loose lips won't sink ships, but they might pass the virus along. We worry about this. We sometimes have a pit in our stomach. We struggle with depression and lassitude—what Irene calls a "COVID Day." These are anxious times too.

Let me count some of the ways.

1. We are anxious about loved ones who live in nursing homes or who live in the tight quarters of some independent living homes.

2. We are anxious about our kids, and going to school, and finding out that they may catch COVID, or be asymptomatic and spread it to older folks, innocently.

3. We are anxious for our front-line workers, who work for too little pay but with few complaints and often with great courage.

4. We are anxious for the poor who can't afford to avoid transit, who can't pay their rent or mortgages, who have hungry kids who won't have good internet in the house for remote instruction.

5. We are anxious about whether it is safe to visit our brothers and sisters and parents and kids, and we are anxious about how to negotiate such visits with respect to masks, or going inside, or sanitization of dishes and doorknobs, and whether we should ask if our hosts engaged in risky behavior of late. It's embarrassing to check up on each other, to doubt each other, and not to have a clear set of social conventions to live by.

7. We are anxious for ourselves, because we're alone more than we like, we are worried about our savings, we miss singing and prayer. It's like we are always walking on eggs.

8. And I haven't even mentioned all the non-COVID issues that give us anxiety. The situation in the States. Fire and Hurricanes and global warming and what it means for our grandkids. Racism and making Black Lives Matter. Anxiety.

Are there antidotes? Well, I'm not going to stand here and say trust in the lord and all shall be well. That's actually not how the world works. The sun shines on both the righteous and the wicked, on all of us regardless of citizenship or creed.

One thing I want to say is this, however. Don't be in denial about your anxiety. If you are depressed, or paralyzed by fear, or really struggling with panic attacks, see a doctor or a therapist. While you might also go to your minister for prayer, if you had a heart attack, you would go to your doctor first. See a therapist if you need a boost. It's okay.

Proverbs 14 also has three things to say about dealing with anxiety at a time like this, too. It isn't everything that could be said. For example, we read there that: "The wicked are overthrown by their evildoing, but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity."

Integrity. I'm not so much talking about inner integrity as I am of community integrity. Community integrity, village peace, and national unity of purpose is a central concern in Old Testament law.

So, when it comes to COVID, think of integrity like this. Right now, it is as if we were all crew on a sinking boat. So, it's all hands-on deck.

And we're all bailing, all handing a pails from the bottom of the boat up to the deck and then pouring the water overboard. We do so together, all in a chain, to keep the boat from sinking. All of us. You see, if the oneness, the integrity, of the anti-COVID bailing chain is broken, even in just one spot or two, the leak is going to get out of control and we're going down.

Bailing together, as a national and provincial team, will just manage to keep us all afloat until we get to a safe harbor and can fix the real problem, the virus. We find refuge from anxiety in the integrity—in the oneness and singlemindedness and neighbourliness—of working together, following all the guidelines and precautions we are asked to, in order to keep each other safe, till then.

It also says in Proverbs 14 that, "Wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding, but it is not known in the heart of fools." We are tempted by the flood of disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories out there on the internet. We are tempted to pick and choose just those so-called facts that suit us.

You know the scurrilous internet memes I'm talking about—things like masks don't work; or vaccines are all, always, dangerous; or social distancing is for sissies like Joe Biden; or young people don't get sick and die so they can ignore COVID. Don't fall for it. Be wise in your understanding by seeking out the direction of a majority of experts.

I mean, if you need cancer treatments, or a heart stent, or Diabetes meds, you go to medical experts, not the internet. You don't have polio, and your blood pressure is under control, and you have a new knee not because you ordered these treatments on Amazon, but because you went directly to the experts. Why should it be different for COVID? Sure, you can get helpful background information about all these diseases on the internet—and especially from the sites of hospitals and universities and the government.

But you have to be discerning—and in the end, don't go for conspiracy—go for your doctor. That's the wisdom of understanding our text encourages.

Finally, Proverbs 14 argues that, "Righteousness exalts a nation and a servant who deals wisely has the king's favor." Righteousness means, most simply, making work of following the just and good rules that protect not only you, but the least and the last and the marginalized all around us.

We don't have kings with real power anymore but in a Democratic society it takes civil righteousness for the gears and levers of our society to work. Let's make them work. Let's obey our modern version of the king, our democratically elected government. And the interesting thing is, if we act with mutual integrity, which I spoke of earlier; if we stay properly informed; if we following the rules—we will, at least in part, be healing our anxiety too.

So that's it. Four ways to work at your anxiety. 1) Get professional help if you need it. 2) Communal integrity. Let's work together for each other until there is a cure. 3) Seek deep understanding from the experts. And finally, individually obey the Covid rules for the good of all society.

These are anxious times. We are bailing, individually and altogether, to stay afloat, to stay on course, and to keep our spirits up. But remember, Holland *was* liberated by Canadians and the underground. Nazis *were* defeated. Canada is a free country where our families and friends have mostly flourished. We will get through this COVID stuff too. Not by pretending all is well, but by doing as Jesus said, by loving God through loving our neighbours. We will, like our grandparents did in WWII, do what we must. And then, soon and very soon, we'll have a welcome back to church barbeque service to beat any we did in years past.