

Jesus addresses the topic of anxiety.
He may have been with an anxious group of people.

Of course - there was plenty to be anxious about in that time -
first century Roman Empire.
There was no shortage of things to cause people to worry.

But anxiety is common to us all.
What do we get anxious about?
We get anxious about our lives – our work – our nation – the world.

Sometimes we are pretty clear about what's causing it.
Sometimes it seems like one thing on the surface
but it's really underlying issues that are the basis of our anxiety.

The images here may be birds and flowers.
But this journey that Jesus is inviting us to take with him
is a journey to feed your soul – clothe our mind – and fill your heart.
The journey of life we are on does have its moments.

Sometimes it gets out of control -
and some guidance – some guides – are helpful.
Would that be fair to say?



Remember before computers and cell phones and now cars
had a GPS planted into them to give you directions?

We used to plan trips with a series of maps and guidebooks.
If you belonged to the American Automobile Association
you could order a Trip-Tick.

I had several trips from Texas to Washington D.C.
plotted out with a magic-marker on pages of the trip tick
that would represent 50 to 100 miles per page.
You would also receive regional maps
giving you an idea of how much geography you had to cover.
They would note off-ramps and rest stops and gas stations.
You had a heads up on everything you were heading toward.
I loved those trip-ticks.

Guidance systems – now we have smart phones
with navigation systems that talk to us.

Oh – if life itself had a guidance system.

Well - being a follower of Jesus gives us a guidance system.

Jesus wants us to live lives
that reach beyond the struggles for everyday sustenance.
If we are filled with fear – we will never enjoy it.
We will never live with joy.

Living into the kingdom is more than subsistence living
and it is certainly not living anxiously.

So what kind of guidance might there be?
What kind of guides?
The surface image here is of birds and flowers.
But – let's go deeper.

Let's think of it as living into the kingdom -
living into the reality of God (which is how Marcus Borg might say it)
living lives past the ordinary stumbling blocks of life.

Jesus says to look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

The birds of the air – he says – didn't sow, reap, or store things -
and yet they manage to live and eat.

Well - what do those birds do?
They scavenge for seeds.
They dig up worms and swoop down on insects.
They don't sit around doing nothing.

He says to look at the lilies of the field.
They neither toil nor spin.
But flowers sure know how to put down roots
and suck up nutrients – stretch for the sun – move with the wind.

If the birds and the flowers are guides for us
their message appears to be that they don't just hang out and do nothing.

They do what they know how to do and do it well.

There is more to it – obviously.

Let's think about other guides.
We often call on others to help make an important decision.
Some kinds of advisors are quite common.

And some just happen – not because we sought them out
but because they happen to be a part of our lives.

Some might even be divine.

Here are a few guides to think about:

One would be the "guide within"
Isaiah called it "the still small voice."
Augustine called it "the teacher within."
Jiminy Cricket call is "always let your conscience be your guide."

The guide within can give you a gnawing gut feeling.
That gut feeling may just tell you something is not right -
or that something is right.

Remember how in Genesis God breathed life into Adam?

A little of the divine was blown into God's human creation.
The guide within could be that little bit of divine residue.

That's why you remember when you have told a fib – you have lied.

You will remember being confronted.
Did you hit your sister? Did you steal that toy?
Did you break that window? Did you take that money?
Did you cause someone harm?

You may have gotten away with it – but the "guide-within" knew.
The guide-within made sure you remembered.

Some call it conscience - the annoying nibbling away of your soul.
Conscience can also be described as the "true light"
which enlightens everyone.

John spoke about the light that shines on everyone –
being the Christ light.

Sometimes there are guides who point out the still small voice -
like the teacher who thanks you for your help
in cleaning up the classroom
after you sneaked a peek at the answer sheet on her desk.

The guide-within takes us beyond ourselves
and our own selfish concerns.
The guide-within is the still small voice that is never still -
and whose impact is never small.

So – that is a little about the "guide within."



Another kind of guide is the "side-by-side" guide.

Sometimes these guides hold our heads and hands.
They help do things and they help us grow our minds.

The unexpected intellectual companion -
encourages you to use your mind to search for truth
instead of simply for more information.

The side-by-side guide may be a soul mate who
who enjoys not only food and fun but meaning and morality.

This is a companion who may help you get away with some things
but never get away from yourself.

Your side-by-side guide may be a sibling, a friend, a spouse.
They are just always goading and guiding you to be a better person.

Who are your side-by-side guides?

If you have ever explored the Himalayas
or known those who have –
you will know about the wilderness experts.
Climbers hire them to help them get up the mountains.

These guides – or sherpas -
are first hired as servants or mere workers.
Yet what often started out an employer/employee relationship
is almost always transformed
as the altitude steepens - and the oxygen levels drop.

Sherpas were not just there to schlep the stuff.
They became trusted companions – partners in the climb.
As the mountain became more monstrous
the by-my-side guide was the most trusted asset on the journey.

When we were in Kenya going from place to place
our drivers were clearly our by-my-side guides.

Our day to day mountains –
(or the many challenges of our lives)
may not be like the Himalayas.

But we do clamor over the obstacles of our own mistakes -
painful histories – poor education – short tempers – addictions -
cancers – depression – you fill in the blank.

We may not always recognize our side-my-side guides.
But then we do not often notice
the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

Perhaps we can try to do that more often.
Who are yours?



There is another guide along the journey -
the "guide above."
I like to call this the "above-the-grid" guide.

We call him Jesus.
Other cultures and religions call the "guide-above"
by different names.
Sometimes we think of it as a visitation.

(We will explore this more in "Angels in our Lives" -
paying attention to messengers in the Bible and in our lives.)

Let's just call them "above-the-grid" guides.
They are not necessarily blinding moments
like Paul's experience on the road - or Jacob's ladder - but maybe.

Maybe like my experience of coming down a "fourteener"
when I encountered the cliff
and needed help to traverse a narrow walkway.
There were people around -
but none seemed connected to the hand that reached down
to steady my journey and comfort my fear.

I could not see any body connected to the hand.

It left me with wonder.

It clothed mind in a wash of beauty and goodness.

It suggests that beauty and goodness are indeed real.
Experiences like this suggest that there is more than meets the eye.
something more to see in the birds of the air
and the lilies of the field.

The guide off the grid - can appear at any time.
Sometimes it is in the coo of a baby - the hug of a child -
or when the glory of creation astounds our eyes -
the red tailed hawk floating high above you in the sunlight -
the flowers leaning gently with the breeze -
yes - the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

Someone suggested that when the love for life itself -
overcomes the personal desire to protect our own life
that a "guide above" - a "guide off-the-grid"
could be present.¹

Guides along the way -

First the inner-guide -
Second the side-by-side guide

Finally the above-guide – the off-the-grid guide

If we will let the birds of the air and the lilies of the field
help along the way -
they will remind us that our innate capabilities
and learned skills are just the beginning.

Then come the guides.
Let's be more aware of them.
Let's let them help us be more alive.

¹ Leonard Sweet. The outline of the inner guide, the side by side guide and the above or off the grid guides also come from Leonard Sweet.