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I have a question for you this morning: What do you call a dinosaur who has a lot of anxiety?... A nervous Rex.

Or maybe you have heard of the two guys who share a ride to work regularly. One of them can't sit in the backseat when they go through a tunnel, for he would have a massive anxiety attack. When he went to the doctor, he was diagnosed with Carpool Tunnel Syndrome.

We may find these jokes humorous, but for the 40 million adults in the U.S. suffering from an anxiety disorder<sup>1</sup>, it's no laughing matter. We all get nervous from time to time, worrying about something that adds stress to our lives, but for 18% of the population of our nation, it's severe enough to hamper their life on a regular basis.

We're not the only ones to experience such feelings, for did you hear the anxiety in Psalm 25? It's filled with shame, fear of enemies, and the recollection of past sins from younger years. Thousands of years ago, King David recorded his feelings of anxiety in this psalm, and yet, he could

begin by saying "I lift up my soul...God, in you I trust." In the midst of his anxiety, the writer somehow made room for trust in God.

That's not always easy to do, is it? To trust that in difficult times God will sustain us? Writer Richard Rohr suggests that we may struggle with the idea of scarcity, which creates anxiety within us:

The flow of grace through us is largely blocked when we are living inside a worldview of scarcity, a feeling that there's just not enough: enough of God, enough of me, enough food, enough mercy to include and forgive all faults. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the mind is apparently unable to imagine anything infinite or eternal. So, it cannot imagine an infinite love, or a God whose "love is everlasting" as the Psalms continually shout.<sup>2</sup>

Rohr then observed that in the ministry of Jesus, there was always enough—remember the story of the young boy who shared his loaves of bread and his fish? Amazing there was enough for a large crowd, even with leftovers. What appeared to be scarcity was in reality enough for everyone.

Rohr suggested:

Our unhealthy economics and politics persist because even Christians largely operate out of a worldview of scarcity: there is not enough land, healthcare, water, money, and housing for all of us; and in America there are never enough guns to keep us safe. A saint always knows that there is more than enough for our need but never enough for our greed...Only a personal experience of unconditional, unearned, and infinite love and forgiveness can move you from the normal worldview of scarcity to the divine world of infinite abundance.

When we don't seem to have enough, God goes about making room for more and more. God continues to fill our lives with blessings, though sometimes we may not feel we have enough, so we continually fill our lives with more and more stuff, hoping that will solve our feelings of scarcity.

I worked with Disciples' theologian Jon Berquist many years ago when we served as editors at Christian Board of Publication. He's now at San Francisco Theological Seminary, where he recently reflected on the recent struggle of our churches: "In

COVID, the pandemic of loneliness and separation has left many of us feeling cut off in this economy where so many people are cut out and left out and discarded in a time when some of our churches are wondering if there is growth left ahead or if they are reaching an end." He sensed that our churches are feeling the pinch of scarcity.

Berquist then reflected on a image from Isaiah and Jeremiah<sup>3</sup> when the prophets looked forward to a time when God would bring forth a righteous branch from a stump of Jesse, from the lineage of King David. Berquist commented, "We need to, I think, start with the recognition that some days we feel like stumps. And precisely from the stump that the shoot and the branch can grow forth, and learning to see not just the injuries and the lack in the world, but to see the potential that exists in those stumps."<sup>4</sup>

Have you ever felt like a stump? Cut down? Lifeless with lack of energy? In a sense, the prophet Jeremiah reflected similar emotions as the writer of

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Psalm 25: a mixture of anxiety and trust, somehow woven together in the lives of God's people.

In the midst of this anxiety that has been rumbling around in God's people for thousands of years, how do we make room for hope?

The psalmist offered a poem of hope that broke through the anxiety to see a better future. The writer of Psalm 25 used a form of poetry called an acrostic, where each line begins with each letter of the alphabet. You may remember such an acrostic from your childhood when we learned our ABCs:

A is an apple hanging in the tree;  
B is the baby crying for me;  
C is the cow that moos in the night;  
D is the dark that disappears with light.

Let's imagine we're writing such an acrostic, using the letters of the word *HOPE*.

H is the *healing* that comes from God's love;  
O is the *openness* that comes from above;  
P are the *possibilities* that greet us each day.  
E is for *everyone* who embraces God's Way.

Now it's your turn to see what hopeful words come to mind for each letter of the word *hope*. Let's begin with the letter H...O...P...E...

As we begin this season of Advent in preparation for the birth of a small baby, may you make room not only for Jesus, but for H...O...P...E.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.thehealthy.com/mental-health/anxiety/weird-anxiety-causes/](http://www.thehealthy.com/mental-health/anxiety/weird-anxiety-causes/)

<sup>2</sup> <https://cac.org/scarcity-or-abundance-2016-01-29/>

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 23:5; Isaiah 11:1.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Jon Berquist by Marcia McFee.