

Reformation Sunday – October 29, 2023

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin

Lord, Keep Us Faithful

Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?” The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!” ¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. ¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. ²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” ²¹ Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.” ²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

God, our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble says to us as we just read in Psalm 46, “Be still and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth”.

Dear fellow celebrants of the Lutheran Reformation.

They lived more than 2,000 years apart from each other. But for me their similarities pop out. Daniel lived about 600 years before the times of Jesus. Luther lived about 1,500 years after Jesus walked the earth. Both were faced with great challenges and forced to make death-defying decisions. In those decisions we see that they remained faithful to the God of free and faithful grace. So this morning as we learn from them our prayer is:

LORD, KEEP US FAITHFUL!

Both Martin Luther and Daniel found them in situations that they surely knew could bring great trouble into their lives.

Daniel had a history with God. Years before this event Daniel had been hauled away from his homeland with the rest of his people. He was taken away into captivity but actually lived a pretty good life. Because of his unique abilities he was brought into the king’s service. Daniel served faithfully. As he served he rose in power. He became the second most powerful man in the most powerful country in the world. Through it all he continued to give testimony that pointed away from himself. He couldn’t take credit for where he was. God had been faithful to him. God had given him his abilities. God deserved the praise.

His enemies grew hateful of Daniel's rise to power and position. They set up a sting operation and succeeded in tricking the king to publish an edict that anyone who worshiped anyone other than the king be thrown into the lion's den. Daniel was now in a spot. Follow the edict and he wouldn't be able to pray to his God but would instead be worshiping an earthly king as god. Disobey the edict by praying to God and show himself disloyal to the king he faithfully was serving. This was truly a no win situation. "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." Nothing changed. In fact his enemies counted on Daniel doing exactly what they figured he would. Stick to God. Trust in him. Get fed to lions.

In every way Daniel got himself into the lion's den. There seemed to be no help. The king didn't help, Daniel's enemies certainly wouldn't help, and Daniel couldn't help himself. The enemies of Daniel celebrated. Soon he would be lion food and they could all move up one position in rank. Never mind Daniel being able to escape. He could never hold the lions off or shut their mouths once they attacked. As he waited for the inevitable he was in deep trouble.

Luther found himself in a sort of lion's den. The church he was a part of was hurting. He was hurting. And the people around him were hurting. At the time they seemed to be facing lions, and they seemed to be doing it alone. Sin and guilt were eating at them and wouldn't let go. What was worse, the church which was supposed to give relief had turned away from the Word of God. Claiming good works to be the way to pay God back. The church had gotten into a vicious cycle of pointing people to themselves to overcome guilt. Things were in a dangerous place at Luther's time. Spiritually people who turn away from the Bible towards themselves are in a lion's den. Luther and the people he served were in deep trouble.

Luther's troubled conscience had led him to become a monk. But he found no peace. He tried starving himself. He tried whipping himself. In his effort to find peace with God, he became a priest, but all his efforts failed. Thankfully his mentor, John Staupitz, who was the vicar general of the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, directed Martin to the study of the Scriptures. That had become a lost practice in the middle ages. The church's teachings were based primarily on the decrees of church councils and the pope and the writings of the church fathers. At first this brought Luther little solace for he found in Scripture that God demands righteousness. With this his troubled conscience had been pounding him for years. But as Luther followed Staupitz from the Erfurt monastery to the theological faculty at the new university in Wittenberg his study of Scripture led h Luther to passages, especially in Romans, like our epistle reading today, which showed that that while our holy God demands righteousness of us, he also through Jesus Christ, gives us that righteousness. Now Luther received the peace of conscience which had been so desperately seeking for years. Now his desire turned to wanting all people to have this peace. So he wrote those 95 theses and posted them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. He wanted those statements to be discussed. Later as his understanding of the Scriptures grew he would refute some of those statements.

Three and one half years later Luther was called to stand before the new, young emperor in the little German city of Worms. When he entered the hall he saw the emperor and all his retinue and there on a table lay his writings. When asked to recant, to take back, what he had written Luther asked for time to prepare his answer. He wanted to discuss. All he was given was the opportunity to recant or not to recant. After a night of prayer once more he stood by that table in front of the assembly. Luther's reply was that some of those writings contained Holy Scripture and it was neither proper nor right to deny the Scriptures. As far as what he himself had written, he said that these writings were based on Scripture and his conscience was bound by the Word of God. "I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. I can do other. So help me God!"

Within days Luther, under safe conduct, was headed back to Wittenberg. He was kidnapped by soldiers from his protector, the elector of Saxony. For about a year he lived incognito as Knight George in the Wartburg Castle in the hills above the village of Eisenach. He had been excommunicated from the church and was considered to be an outlaw. He could be put to death by anyone. Luther had put himself into the lion's den by remaining faithful to the Lord.

Daniel strength to remain faithful was also found in the Word of God. He knew that the Savior Messiah was coming to redeem the world. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that a remnant of the Israelites would return to the Promised Land and that the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that through their seed all nations on the earth would be blessed, would be fulfilled.

The Holy Spirit working through the Word gave both Daniel and Luther the strength to remain faithful.

Your lions and enemies might be different, but no less dangerous. When you fall into a sin and guilt has a hold, do you look to yourself for help? It's the way of the world, isn't it? Pull yourself up, help yourself, you have to make it yourself. Self-reliance becomes your enemy. Financial strain bringing your household finances down? Politics at work stressing you out? Bullies or bad grades or both at school? These can lead you right into the lion's den as you figure the burden is on you for relief. The temptation to shortcut maybe even sin is dangerous. You only feel worse when you realize you can't free or help yourself. That's when you get desperate and start to beg God. You might make deals with him, offering to buy his happiness towards you. On top of that you face a world that wants you to give up on the Word of God as the sole source of teaching for faith and life. The world claims it's stupid to believe that old book. You're old fashioned and foolish thinking that's God's Word and not just a bunch of things some men made up. You can't rely on it, can't listen to it, and never follow it. The lions roar and we feel alone in the fight. We get ourselves into deep trouble.

Something miraculous happened inside that lion's den. Daniel was thrown where he should've died. But Daniel wasn't alone. Not at all. He hadn't been alone praying in his upper room. He wasn't alone standing before the king receiving the sentence of death by lions. And he wasn't alone facing the lions. God rescued him. Daniel told the king, "My God sent an angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight." How was that possible? Not that the mouths of the lions were shut, that's easy for God the creator of lions to do. How could Daniel say he was innocent in God's sight? That had nothing to do with Daniel and everything to do with God and his promises. God assured Daniel and his ancestors before him that a Messiah would come and be everything they needed to be. God kept him safe not just from the lions in this life but to eternal life too. Daniel believed in the promised Messiah who would get Daniel safely to his heavenly kingdom.

Facing your lions isn't about you. Facing your sin isn't about you. It's about the one with you. You aren't alone. Not ever. God is with you. He sends his holy angels to protect you in physical danger. More important he already sent a Savior, the same Messiah Daniel believed in. We needed a Savior who wasn't in the same situation we were. He could come and rescue us from our deep trouble and deadly sins. Jesus wasn't sinful. So he entered our existence and lived like us but perfectly for us. His life counted for your life and mine. He was in every way our perfect Savior. He was the king who sacrificed everything for us, including himself. His death on the cross and resurrection provide us with a spiritual rescue. Greater than rescuing us from any lion's den, Jesus promises no matter what happens he'll bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.

Daniel didn't know God would shut the lion's mouths. Luther didn't know God would work through him to reform the entire church. We don't know whether God will allow us another day of life or not. We don't know what car accident, health scare, or other danger is waiting out there for us. But we know our living God. The stories of Daniel and Luther aren't about those individuals. They're stories about God and his keeping them

safe. Your story isn't about you, it's about God. Live knowing you don't have to hide the fact you're a Christian. In your actions, treatment of others, and in prayers showcase that. Demonstrate who you trust in. Go confidently through life not overly fearful of what might happen to you physically. Trust in God to protect you, even if he allows physical harm to come to you. His love knows exactly what you need to get you to heaven. That's his entire goal, get you to heaven. He's done what's necessary in Jesus. He'll continue to do what's necessary until you're there.

The Bible guides us as we pray, "Lord, keep me faithful!" Listen to God's promises given through Isaiah: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

Peter assured his readers and us: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." (1 Peter 5:10)

Finally we note what encouragement St. Paul gives us through his letter to the Ephesians. "¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." (Ephesians 6:11-16)

Daniel and Martin Luther set the example. The Holy Spirit promises to answer for our God, So we pray confidently and continually, **"Lord, Keep Us Faithful!"**

Joel Jaeger