

The First Sunday of Endtime, Reformation Sunday, November 1, 2020 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam

Daniel 6:10-12, 16-22 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 The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”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.”

We’re going to start with a simple multiple choice question this morning. How old was Daniel when was thrown into the lion’s den? A. 25 B. 42 or C. 80. If you guessed eighty years old, then you are correct. Daniel was a young man of about twenty when his three good friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace. For sixty years he faithfully served in the Babylonian Empire. In fact Daniel was so good at administering the affairs of government that at the age of eighty King Darius wanted to put him in charge of his whole kingdom.

How could Daniel rise to such a position of power and influence without losing his faith in the one true God? You know the answer. The Lord was with Daniel just as he was with Joseph when he rose to prominence in the land of Egypt. How was Martin Luther able to stand up and confess the true teachings of God’s Word with death staring him in the face? The Lord was with him. How are we able to confess our faith in these last days without compromising or watering down our beliefs? The Lord is also with us as we confessed in the words of Psalm 46, “God is our Refuge and Strength, an ever present help in time of trouble.”

This is an excellent Biblical account to consider on Reformation Day 2020. We heard part of this chapter three weeks ago as part of our series the Christian being a citizen in two kingdoms, the Church and the state. Daniel was able to serve in government and remain faithful to the one true God. But as we see this morning it wasn’t always. Daniel faced those challenges with the same boldness and confidence that Martin Luther had as he worked to restore correct Biblical doctrine to the medieval church. That leads us this morning to develop that same boldness and confidence. We can do exactly what Daniel did:

LEAVE THE LIONS TO THE LORD.

- We can expect opportunities to confess our faith in Jesus.
- We can expect deliverance from the Lord.

Don’t be surprised if the Lord gives you opportunities to boldly confess your faith in Jesus. Some of these opportunities could be very challenging. Notice the challenge or opportunity that came to Daniel. “Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went to his upstairs room where the windows were opened to Jerusalem.” King Darius issued a decree that during a thirty day period everyone had to pray to him and not to their gods. For most people that was not a problem. They believed in many different gods. They were tolerant and acceptable and open to other religions and teachings. Not so Daniel. He would never pray to a strange god or bow down to a heathen idol even if it meant losing his life.

Why did the king issue such a strange decree? It was the evil and nasty men who wanted to get rid of Daniel. They hatched the scheme to get the king to make this decree. They knew Daniel would not stop praying to the Lord. Governments can change overnight. Governments that were once favorable and tolerant of Christians can suddenly turn

against them and make their lives miserable. It would be terribly naïve of us to think it impossible that this could happen to us in our land. Even now, Christians who claim that Jesus Christ is the only way back to God are denounced as unintellectual bigots and fundamentalist fanatics.

Daniel did not back down. He did not go upstairs to his room, lock the doors, close the window and then kneel in prayer quietly. No, the daily pattern in his life was to open the window and pray towards Jerusalem. "Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."

Daniel prays facing towards Jerusalem. Here he was in captivity in the land of Babylon but his hope of being saved rested in Jerusalem even though the city and the magnificent temple built by Solomon was in ruins. It was there in Jerusalem that the priests offered sacrifices of animals and sprinkled their blood on the altar to picture the blood of Jesus that would be shed for the sins of the world. Every religion in the world teaches that you can make yourself worthy of whatever god you believe in by serving that god to the best of your ability. Only in the Christian faith do you have God himself coming down into this world and becoming one of us in human flesh, living the perfect life we could never live, suffering on the cross for our sin, all of our sin, and then rising again from the dead. Daniel continued to confess his faith in this one true God by throwing the windows open and praying toward Jerusalem.

The evil and nasty men knew they had Daniel between a rock and a hard place. After watching him pray, they knew he was headed for the lions' den. They told the king, "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king knew he had to keep his word, even though he loved Daniel and wanted him to be first in command. "The laws of the Medes and Persians could not be repealed." You just don't know, dear Christians, when suddenly everything around you can change, and you will be threatened with death for what you believe and confess.

Consider for a moment what courage it took Martin Luther to post 95 Theses or statements on the church door. He wanted people to read his words about reforming the church and getting rid of its false teaching. He knew what the church did to those who questioned their doctrine and authority. Heretics such as John Huss were burned at the stake. In spite of the grave danger, Martin Luther translated the Bible into a language people could understand. He wrote, preached sermons, taught classes and composed hymns that taught how people are justified by faith alone without the works of the law. It was Martin Luther who boldly condemned the church for its teaching about purgatory because this teaching was based on human tradition and not the teachings of the Bible. He boldly confessed that Baptism is a holy thing that God does for us. He boldly confessed that it is a compromise to believe that the body and blood of Jesus are not actually physically received in Holy Communion. That bold confession about the Sacraments made it impossible to walk together with those who saw the Sacraments as ordinances or something we do as our response for our love to God and not a miracle God does for us.

As Luther studied the Scriptures in preparation for his lectures, he learned to know that same God who had strengthened Daniel. He had come to know Jesus as the heavenly Father's gift of righteousness. The peace of heart and mind that had eluded him for so many years was now his. This is what he wanted the people of Wittenberg and Germany to know and feel. So he was willing to face the lions of pope and emperor. Dr. Luther was strengthened so that 500 years ago, December 10, 1520, he burned the proclamation from the pope demanding that he take back his writings or be excommunicated. Just a few months later in April of 1521 he stood before the emperor in Worms and said, "Unless I am convinced on the basis of Scripture I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me."

As we boldly confess our faith we can expect to face the lions. Our lions aren't roaring, ravenous beasts. But things like the attitudes of our society, ridicule of coworkers, neighbors, maybe even family members come our way when we boldly confess our faith in Jesus. But boldly we can confess our faith in Jesus, for through him we have forgiveness and the promise of eternal life in the peace and glories of heaven.

The Christian Church has been blessed by people who will not stand down but boldly stand up and confess the truths of God's Word even it means giving up their lives. Daniel and Martin Luther were ready to give up their lives to the lions because they knew the Lord would be with them and deliver them even if this meant giving up their lives.

Like Daniel and Luther we can expect deliverance from the Lord. The king of Babylon was deeply troubled and concerned for Daniel. You can almost see the tears in his eyes as he says to Daniel, "May your God whom you serve continually, rescue you!" The power of Daniel's God was already known to the rulers in Babylon. An earlier king of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar praised the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they survived the fiery furnace without a hair being singed, their robes being burned or the smell of fire coming on them. King Darius is hoping that Daniel's powerful God will deliver him from the mouths of the hungry lions. The king is so troubled he refuses to eat and refuses to be entertained and cannot sleep at night.

At the first light of dawn King Darius hurries to the lion's den. He calls out to Daniel with an anguished voice: "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you." Here is a king who has kept a pit of hungry lions. Here is a king who has enjoyed seeing his enemies thrown to these lions and torn to pieces and eaten alive. There is only one hope he has for Daniel. He hopes Daniel's "living" God will rescue him. All the years of boldly confessing his faith have not gone unnoticed. Later Darius would issue a decree that everyone in his kingdom was to fear and reverence the God of Daniel. Daniel was privileged to see the bold confession of his faith bear fruit in the lives of these heathen people, even the king. Daniel has no problem answering the king from the lions' den because Daniel is alive. He tells the king, "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 anything wrong before you, O king." Can't you see the lions drooling as they look at Daniel and wish they could make a quick meal of him? Can't you see them wanting to swat at him with their sharp claws? God has sent his angel to watch over Daniel and protect him. Daniel was God's dear child. He was innocent in the eyes of God through the Savior who was to come just as we are innocent in the eyes of our God through Jesus who has come. "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." I have nothing to offer God except my life of sin. God has everything to offer me in the perfect life Jesus lived for me and the perfect death he died for me.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Deliver us from evil." The Lord can deliver us from our problems of life by taking us home to heaven. He can also leave us here on this earth to bear witness and confess the way of salvation through Jesus our Savior. Jesus will send us the Holy Spirit to help us witness boldly and he will deliver us when we are challenged for what we believe. It says of Daniel, "And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God."

So we are encouraged this morning to leave the lions to the Lord as we boldly confess our faith in Jesus. As we do that we can expect deliverance from the Lord. Amen.