

Reformation Sunday  
October 29, 2023  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
**A Time for Steadfast Faith**

**Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23 (EHV)**

*Now, when Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house. It had windows on its upper story that opened toward Jerusalem. Three times each day he would get on his knees and pray and offer praise before his God. He continued to do that, just as he had been doing before this. Then these men came as a group and found Daniel praying and seeking favor from his God. They then went and asked the king about the decree. "Your Majesty, did you not sign a decree that anyone who prays to any god or person for thirty days except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the den of lions?" The king answered, "Indeed I did. The order is established as a law of the Medes and the Persians that cannot be revoked." ...*

*Then the king gave the order, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you." A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the pit. The king sealed it with his signet ring and the signet rings of his nobles so that nothing could be changed with regard to Daniel's situation. Then the king went to his palace. He spent the night without food, and no entertainment was brought before him. But he could not sleep. At dawn the king arose as soon as it was light and hurried to the lions' den. As he came near the pit, he cried out in a fearful voice. The king said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, was your God, whom you serve continually, able to rescue you from the lions?" Then Daniel spoke with the king. "Your Majesty, may you live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the mouth of the lions. They have not hurt me because he found me innocent in his presence. Also before you, Your Majesty, I have committed no crime." Then the king was very glad and said that Daniel should be brought up from the pit. So Daniel was brought up from the pit, and he was unharmed because he trusted in his God.*

Dear friends in Christ,

In the Year of our Lord, 1521, young Martin Luther stood before the most powerful rulers of Europe. The Holy Roman Emperor and others brought Luther before them to recant. The lowly German monk was to apologize for teaching against the mighty Roman Catholic Church and against the pope. He was to recant and no longer preach and teach against the traditions of the church of his day. But Martin stood firm on the Word of God and would not recant what he wrote unless he could be shown that he was teaching against God's Word. The stakes could not be higher. For those who opposed the church and the pope were often burned at the stake. Luther had already been excommunicated and soon he would be declared an outlaw by the secular rulers. Execution seemed to be next. Luther knew the risks and still would not recant. It was a time for steadfast faith and Luther stood fast on the Bible. In the end, the Lord preserved his life, and we are beneficiaries of the back-to-the-Bible teachings Luther advocated.

But Luther is not the only one who stood firm on God's Word. About 100 years prior to Luther's stand, another man stood firm on the Word, especially that we are saved by God's grace alone. He pointed out the false teachings of the church and in 1415 was called to appear before the authorities

at the Council of Constance. John Hus knew the risks but stood firm on the Word and would not recant the clear teachings of the Bible. He was condemned, burned at the stake and his ashes scattered in the river.

That same council decided to condemn as heretic someone who had already died. They dug up this man's bones, burned them and scattered his ashes on a river. This person had lived in England a generation before Hus. He also taught what the Bible tells us about being saved by grace alone. He had the audacity to translate the Bible into a language his people could read, English. He faced opposition by the church for teaching what the Bible said but he would not recant either. John Wyclif was his name.

As we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation today, we naturally think of Martin Luther and the reformers in Germany. That is our heritage. But God raised up people in every generation and in many places to stand firm on the truth of God's Word. You can find many examples throughout history and today we go back about 2,000 years before Wyclif, Hus and Luther to see a man face the same risk of death but refuse to turn aside from the Lord God. He was given the name Belteshazzar by his captors. We know him better as Daniel.

Daniel was likely in his 80s now. He had served faithfully under the Babylonians for decades. Now the Medes and Persians were in control and Daniel was again made a high official. This time he was one of three who oversaw the regional governors of the empire. The other officials were jealous and wanted to get Daniel removed for bad conduct. Of course, Daniel was not corrupt in his government position, so they had to make up a law to specifically target Daniel. The officials trick Darius into signing a new law that stated everyone must pray only to the king for 30 days. The punishment for praying to any god besides the king was severe – death by being thrown into a den of hungry lions. Darius signed the law ignorant of the evil plan of his officials.

Daniel had choices to make now. The law was directed at him. He had to know they were out to get him. He had to know they would be sending spies to watch him day and night to see if he prayed to the Lord, as was his well-known custom. And Daniel knew that the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be repealed. If he was caught praying to the Lord during the 30 days, he would certainly be thrown to the lions. Does Daniel stop praying? It's only 30 days after all. God will understand. Does he hide his practice of praying to the Lord with the windows open towards Jerusalem? It's only 30 days. He could return to his regular practice later.

Very few if any of us here have faced anything close to the life-or-death decisions that men like Daniel, Luther, Hus or Wyclif faced. Holding steadfast to the Lord and his Word meant being sentenced to death by the earthly rulers. We need to be prepared if ever put in such a situation. However, it is more likely that we are faced with death by a thousand cuts. The sinful world presents us with lots of little ways to compromise on God's Word.

You don't really believe God created everything in six days, do you? You don't really believe Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish, do you? You don't really believe God covered the whole earth with a flood, do you? You are not really that ignorant to believe that someone could be born of a virgin, are you? You know the early Christians just made up the story about Christ's resurrection to grow their religion, don't you? Everyone knows the Bible contains lots of myths and legends and historical inaccuracies. Don't you agree? How can you be so unloving and intolerant as to say that only people

who trust in Jesus as the Savior and Son of God will be saved? Do you really believe in a God who would condemn billions of people who follow other religions?

Instead of threatening us with death, believers are made to feel stupid for believing everything God says in the Bible. Believers are threatened with being excluded from normal society. In some cases, it can affect a believer's ability to work for certain companies or get their research published in scientific journals. Believers are portrayed as intolerant and hate filled people. It is natural for us to want to be liked, to be thought of as loving, intelligent, and accepted by our peers. The world around us might not threaten our lives for holding steadfast to the Lord and the truth of all of his Word, but it threatens to make our lives uncomfortable. And every one of us has given in at some point and therefore given the impression that we don't actually believe everything in the Bible.

God clearly reveals the sin of many of the people in the Bible, and though Daniel was certainly a sinner like us, God only saw fit to reveal to us the faith of Daniel in action and not his sins. Daniel holds steadfast to his Lord.

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These men tell Darius. Darius doesn't want to lose his best official to the lions, but he is trapped by his own decree and sends Daniel to his death. The question before us this morning is why Daniel would choose to continue praying as he always did, knowing the lions would be in his future? The answer comes at the end of the story. The Lord sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions and Daniel survived the night with the lions without any harm.

*Then the king was very glad and said that Daniel should be brought up from the pit. So Daniel was brought up from the pit, and he was unharmed because he trusted in his God.*

Daniel trusted in his God. Daniel had faith that the Lord was in control, that the Lord God would do whatever was best. If that meant Daniel died in the lion's den and went to be with God, good. If it meant God would rescue Daniel from the lions, good. Daniel trusted in his God.

We have an advantage over Daniel. We live after Christ came. We know the story of how our salvation was won. We can read again and again how Jesus conquered the devil by resisting every temptation and crushed the power of the devil by offering his life as payment for all our sins on the cross. We know and celebrate every year how the Son of God became one of us through the miracle of the virgin birth so that his life and death would count for us. We know and celebrate every year how the Son of Man died and then rose again to prove that we are justified before God. We are not guilty of sin because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Because of Christ, we can sing with joy, "Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior." (CW 810)

By faith, we also can remain steadfast in God's Word. As we seek to do this in our lives, we can also follow the example of Daniel in the way we do this. Certainly, we can learn from Luther as well, but by his own admission, his tongue and pen were too sharp and harsh at times when dealing with his opponents. When Daniel greets the man who made him spend a night in a den full of hungry lions, he

says, *“Your Majesty, may you live forever!”* What honor and respect Daniel shows for the one who ordered his execution. What glory Daniel gave to the Lord. Of course, Jesus did even better. He not only died for those who ordered his crucifixion but also asked his Father in heaven to forgive those who executed him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. Stand firm on the Word. Let nothing move you. But do this with kindness, gentleness and humility. Darius was certainly impressed with Daniel’s trust in the Lord, and it opened Darius to considering that the Lord is the true God. Perhaps your stand on the Word of God in kindness, gentleness and humility will make someone who opposed God’s Word at least consider listening. And when someone begins to consider God’s Word, the Holy Spirit can do his amazing work of bringing someone to faith in the only Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.