

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Reformation – October 30th and November 2nd, 2014

Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23

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. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 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 man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "The decree stands--in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."...

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!" 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. 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. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 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?" Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! 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, O king." 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.

Dear children of God's Kingdom,

Have you ever had to take a stand, a stand for the truth, a stand when everyone else seems against you, a stand for what you know is right? Imagine how tough it had to be for Daniel to take a stand in a foreign land when everyone else was obeying the king's edict? Imagine the pressure there had to be on Martin Luther as he took a stand when not just the world but the whole church seemed to be against him. Have anything really changed in our world? There is still a need for us to take stand, isn't there? There is a need to stand firm against the attacks of Satan. The pillars of the Reformation - grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone - are constantly under heavy assault. The pressure to fold and abandon such truths remains the same.

Again think of the pressure Daniel faced as I'm sure many friends told him to just give in and bow before the king. If you are familiar with the history of the Reformation you might remember how Martin Luther was being challenged with the question -- "What makes you right, Martin?" "How can you possibly think that you are right, and that everyone else is wrong?"

Has that changed? People are still asking that question, "What makes you right?" What makes you, the little WELS, think that you are right and that so many others are wrong?" The real question they are asking is why don't you just cave in and give into what everyone else is doing? Life in Babylon could have been easier for Daniel if he just bowed his knee with the masses. Luther could have kept quiet and caved into the pressure and recanted his teachings. Then, he would not have had to run and hide because of a ban placed on his life. We, too, could give in to the fight. It would make life easier for us, wouldn't it? To follow the masses, to be careful not to rock the boat might give us a smoother ride as a church. Perhaps the result would be more members, bigger buildings, and more ministries. So should we give in or continue to take a stand? I pray the Lord moves us to repeat the confession of Martin Luther.

As we celebrate today the bold stand made by the Reformer Luther, I pray we learn from our Old Testament example this morning to do the same. We are to obey God rather than men. We too, in the face

of opposition, trusting in our God, are to:

Theme: Stand Firm In The Word of God!

1. Our faith is always under attack

2. In Christ we are victorious

If I asked our Sunday School children what happened to Daniel, I'm sure most could give me an answer. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. But do we remember why and what led up to this? Daniel was one of the Jewish exiles taken into Babylon in 605 B.C.. While in Babylon, Daniel faithfully served the Lord and in doing so distinguished himself as a wise and capable administrator under several rulers. There were 120 satraps or governors appointed throughout the kingdom of Babylon and they had to report back to three administrators, one of which was Daniel. In fact, Daniel served so well in this high position the king planned to set Daniel over the whole kingdom.

The recognition Daniel received made other public officials jealous of Daniel. So they began to look for skeletons in Daniel's closet, but instead found Daniel was trustworthy and not corrupt or negligent in any way. But these enemies of Daniel had one last card to play. They knew about Daniel's faithfulness to the Lord God and His Word. They said to themselves: **"We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."** So this group of administrators and satraps started whispering into King Darius's ear the idea to make an edict which says that no man shall pray to any (G)od except the king for the next thirty days. If anyone is caught praying to anyone except the king he should be thrown into the lion's den. The king and his ego fell for this and he put this decree in writing.

Now these men waited to see what Daniel would do - would he follow this decree and save himself or would obey God and His Word? **"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."** Think about Daniel's choice here! He probably knew that jealous men were after him. He knows that praying to his God could mean more than his job. It could mean his life. But Daniel chose to listen to God's Word. He would worship God alone.

What were Daniel's other options? Was he to pray to Darius? No way! Was he to stop praying for a month? Daniel wouldn't think of it! Daniel did not even close his door to pray in secret. To him that would give others the impression that he is denying his God. Instead, Daniel got down on his knees and prayed. He prayed to God giving thanks to Him, even in this time of distress. Daniel prayed to his God, giving thanks, just as he had done before. Daniel would not compromise his faith. He stood firm in God's Word.

I've often wondered what I would have done under those circumstances. Don't we have to admit we have been ashamed of God and His Word under far less pressure? We too, like Daniel, face pressures to keep quiet and temptations to not stand firm in the truth of God's Word. Should we give into the world's view of sex and marriage or should we take a stand when God says the gift of sex is only for one man and one woman committed to one another in marriage? Should we join in with all the churches today in their big ecumenical push for unity by agreeing to disagree on points of doctrine, calling those details unimportant, or should we listen to God who says **"to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them?"**(Romans 16:17). Should we give into the modern view of religion which treats all faiths as equal and says there are many ways to heaven, or do we take a stand and proclaim God's truth that there is only one way and Jesus is that way? Should we empty the sacraments of their power and call them mere symbols because it is too hard for people to understand how such wonderful blessings can be given through ordinary water, bread, and wine? In fact, should we allow an attitude that treats the Scriptures like a buffet, where people can pick and choose what they like and what makes sense to them, while rejecting the rest?

It might make things easier for us, wouldn't it? When we face peer pressure from friends or from others outside our church it would be easier not to stand firm on all the truths in God's Word. It would've been easier for Daniel as well. But I pray that the Lord gives us the strength, like Daniel, to stand firm. I pray we stand firm in God's Word. We know where it got Daniel - tossed into a den full of lions. Jesus also tells us taking a stand for Him and His Word will get us insults and ridicule. Jesus warns in our Gospel this morning **"all men will hate you because of me"** (Matthew 10). But then Jesus also gives us the comforting promise that: **"he who stands firm to the end will be saved."**

Daniel found this out in a truly remarkable way as he spent the night among a bunch of hungry, lions. The next morning the king, with anguish in his voice, expected the worst as he shouted down to Daniel: **"Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"** Then came back the very unexpected, remarkable reply: **"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, O king."** Daniel came out of that den without a single wound on him. His trust in God was not in vain. And neither was Luther's. Think of how God spared Luther's life again and again so that Luther could teach and preach God's saving truths. Now it is our turn to place our trust in God as we take our stand.

Teachings of work righteousness, telling us there are things we must do to be saved, such as Paul deals with in our epistle this morning, are still very prevalent. The Gospel, which is the most important truth of all, is still under attack. This is why the Lord wants us to stand firm. This is why we listen to God when He tells us not to add or subtract or change a single word He has given to us. These words give us Christ. They are His Words. They reveal to us our Savior. When we trust in God's Word and not in the words of men, we too are saved. We are saved by our God who became a man - a perfect man who always stood firm in the Word. Jesus came to save us from a roaring lion called Satan who sought to eternally destroy us. By his perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross Jesus shut the devil's mouth and rescued us from hell. We get to go free from sin, death, and hell without suffering a single wound for by **"his wounds we have been healed."** Then, Jesus returned from the lion's den (from suffering hell and death) and on the third day we get to see the blessed results. The unexpected remarkable news is still ringing throughout the earth: He lives! And therefore we will live!

Of this we can be sure - some things remain the same. As in the day of Daniel, as in the day of Luther, the devil knows what is at stake, and so he will continue to assault God's saving Word. Satan will keep trying to knock down the pillars of grace alone, of faith alone, and of Scripture alone. That's why my prayer today is the Lord gives us the same strength of Daniel & courage of Martin Luther. May the Lord keep us steadfast in His Word. As Martin Luther wrote so beautifully in the hymn we just sang:

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not over power us. This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He judged the deed is done! One little word can fell him. (CW 200:3)

Only in Jesus is such a victory ours and only in God's Word is this victory proclaimed. So how can we do anything other than stand firm in God's Word saying: "Here we stand. We cannot do otherwise. God help us!" Amen.