



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 2, 2008

1st Sunday of End Time

Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 46

Second Lesson: Galatians 5:1-6

Gospel: Matthew 10:16-23

Stand Firm in Your Trust in God

He is the highest authority

He is the ultimate source of help

One of the truths of the Reformation that we focus on is really the three “Solas”, the Latin word for “only” or “alone.” Luther taught that when it came to our salvation, we are saved by faith “alone”, by God’s grace “alone” and that Scripture “alone” was the “only” authority— Sola fide (“by faith alone”), Sola gratia (“by grace alone”), and Sola scriptura (“by Scripture alone”)—the three “Solas” of the Reformation. In Luther’s own life he had to put that into practice at the Diet of Worms, where he was called before the Emperor and the members of the Catholic Church. Their leaders argued their case, and Luther was supposed to defend his writings. The only defense he was given was they were laid forward and they said, “Are these your writings?” He said, “Yes.” Then they asked him to take them back, recant them, and if not, he would have to face the consequences. That was the defense. Luther asked for a night to think about it.

Through that night he had to think about how true is “by faith alone,” “by grace alone” and “by Scripture alone” as the authority. The next day is where he took his stand. He said, “Here is where I stand. I can do no other” (at least that is how it is reported by some historians) “that unless I am shown from Scripture where I have erred, I cannot recant these teachings because they are based on Scripture. People can err. Councils can err, but Scripture does not err. Unless you show me from that, that is where I am taking my stand, and I am going to stand firm on those truths.”

So then they left and Luther was placed under the Emperor’s ban—not Band-Aid® or rock band—ban, which meant anyone that found Martin Luther could kill him. It was now open season on Martin Luther. And Luther knew that was going to be the case. So in the face of death, he took his stand on grace alone, faith alone and Scripture alone because he was moved by God to believe that’s what God had said.

Can you see now why this First Lesson is the First Lesson for Reformation Sunday? Don’t we see Daniel doing the same thing?—taking his stand on God in the face of death. Daniel had become one of the three people that were right underneath the King of the Medes and the Persians. There were 160 governors or satraps as they were called. They reported to three, one of which was Daniel, and then the three reported to the King. So he was a big muckity muck in the Persian kingdom. The other leaders, the other nobles, were jealous of Daniel, mad at Daniel, envious of Daniel and all those

other things that are not fruits of the Spirit, and they said, "We have to find out something to discredit Daniel and get rid of him." They dug and dug and dug and couldn't find any dirt on him. He served the King faithfully because he viewed it as a way to serve God faithfully. So finally they said, "The only way we are going to trip up Daniel is if it has something to do with the God whom he serves continually. You heard the King himself say that a couple times right?"

So they had the King pass a law that for 30 days you had to pray to the King alone, not to any other man or any other god or else you would get thrown into the lions' den. You can see how the King, who had a sinful nature, this would appeal to him, right? It would kind of boost the ego a wee little bit. "If anyone wants to pray, they have to pray to me? That sounds pretty good." You wonder if his crown fit that night or if his head swelled up a little bit too big.

So then the edict is passed. Daniel knows the edict. Do you find it amazing what Daniel does next? He goes and three times a day, as he had always done, in the window that faced towards Jerusalem, he prayed. But did you notice how it described in Scripture how he prayed? It said, "He prayed giving thanks." If your life was hanging in the balance, would you be busy giving thanks or would you say, "Lord save me. Lord, help me. Lord, make this change." That's kind of amazing, isn't it? Giving thanks three times a day?

Put yourself in Daniel's shoes. How hard would it be for you to stand firm in your trust in God? Do you think at least at that afternoon prayer time, when you get by that window and look out and see the sun streaming, wouldn't you say, "You know what? It's hurting my eyes. I better back away from the window a little bit" and use it as your excuse not to be seen doing what you know they are waiting for you to do, right? Think of all the excuses that would have come into his mind not to do what he had always done, which would have been a denial of his trust in God, and a way of saying he had to take things in his own hands. "You know that morning breeze coming from the west is kind of cool this morning. I better just pray in the other room, around the corner, where no one can see me." Think of the temptations to deny his worship of God and his trust in God. Think of every rationalization he could have come up with why it would be a good idea not to do this.

We are good at that, especially when it involves ourselves. We never rationalize, do we? Do you know of anyone that has said, "I'm not giving to the church anymore because they made this decision or that decision" or "I'm not serving in the church anymore because they made this decision or that decision"? Are you familiar with that at all, heard that at all or thought that to yourself at all? "If they do this, then I'm going to do that and that will show them." We don't stand firm in our trust in God and say God will take care of it. Are we going to take matters into our own hands and not live our faith anymore simply because we are upset about something? And if something like this has happened in your life and in the life of others, did it involve a threat of death? Or was it something closer to the color of a carpet?

The truth of the matter is that you and I don't always stand firm in Christ, do we? We can come up with all kinds of reasons and excuses to justify our sin of not trusting in God and not serving God or doing something else because we are afraid of what might happen, or we are afraid of how it might hurt us or make us feel. We defend our pride more quickly than we defend serving God, and that is sin. But you think we have all kinds of reasons.

You know the story of Daniel and the lions' den, I'm sure, but do you know the story of Daniel? Do you know who he was and what he was? When they first threatened Jerusalem in about 605 B.C., Daniel was some of the cream of the crop that was taken off by the Babylonians back over in that direction. Jerusalem was still there. Judah was still there as a nation, but the cream of the crop, some of their government officials, some of their wise men and people like that were taken off. So Daniel was taken off in 605 B.C., forced to live in a country that was not his own, and you know what they did to him? They said, "You know what? You're not Daniel anymore. We are going to give you another name, and you are going to answer only to that name. You are going to spend three years with this guy over here, and you are going to learn the language and the culture. We are going to have you serve in our government because we think you're pretty sharp."

So Daniel is serving a government that crated him away from his home, away from the temple, called him another name, and made him serve. The amazing thing is that he served, and he served faithfully because that was how he was serving his God.

The year 586 B.C. comes. The temple is destroyed. The kingdom is conquered and pretty much everyone is carried off to Babylon. Do you think he had a reason to be bitter towards God and say, "God, you've had me here almost 20 years now and I don't get to go home? Now our whole kingdom is destroyed. My way of life as I knew it is gone and your temple is gone." Do you think he had a reason to get bitter and shake his fist at God and say, "I don't want to stand firm in you. You haven't been faithful to me."

By the time this comes, what we just read in Daniel 6, it's another 40 years down the line. He has been serving faithfully in this kingdom. He has been raised to that place of one of the three underneath the King. Yet he is still faithfully serving God day after day. He has to be an old man now. Yet, three times a day he gets on his knees and thanks God. "God thank you for crating me from my homeland. Thank you for making them change my name. God thank you for all these things you've let happen in my life." Does that make sense to you? Can you see yourself doing that? Think of how we get petty over stuff a lot different than that.

Look at his trust in the Lord. It boggles my mind. I don't know if I would have that kind of trust in the Lord if I was put through everything he was. If they said, "You pray to your God, I'm going to throw you in the lions' den"—I don't know. I've never really liked thinking of myself as Purina Lion Chow. I can think of excuses why I wouldn't have done it. It amazes me and boggles my mind that Daniel did it and that he was still

praying thanking God after he had gone through six decades of this. It kind of puts our whining into perspective, doesn't it?

Think about his service to the Lord and what it was like as he served the King. We read verses 10-12 and then we skipped 13, 14 and 15 and jumped back in at 16 where he said, "the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den." In 13, 14 and 15, the King spent most of the day trying to find a way to change the laws of the Medes and the Persians. He knew he couldn't, but he tried to find some way to do it because he didn't want to throw Daniel into the lions' den. He realized what his own sinful ego had gotten him into; losing probably what he viewed as his most trustworthy adviser. He saw how they had plotted against him, but now he saw that he had been manipulated into a corner and his own law system had boxed him there and he felt horrible. So he says, "May your God, whom you serve continually, take care of you because obviously I've screwed up!"

Then it says that this King, who spent his night quite often at lavish dinners with entertainment brought to him, went back to his room and didn't have any of it. Doesn't that boggle your mind too? If you work for someone else, can you see your employer looking at your service and putting himself through this, not sleeping all night because of the thought that he might lose you? Not eating because of the thought that he might lose you? Not having entertainment because of the thought he might lose you? Look at how faithfully Daniel served in the face of all those things I described and that the King goes back and spends the night beating himself up for being such an idiot and passing such a stupid law. That's amazing isn't it?—that his trust in the Lord was not just there when he kept praying. His trust had been there for six decades serving God so faithfully that this is how the King responded to him. That's amazing, this faith in the Lord that showed itself in action for 60 years so that the King was so touched by him. He served the King as an authority, but he served God as the highest authority, and you see that put into practice and you see what happens.

So then you know the rest of the story. The ultimate source of his help was not Daniel himself. It wasn't the King who was one of the most powerful men in the world, but who had boxed himself into a corner and he couldn't do anything to help him. They throw him into the lions' den and he spends the night and says that God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. That sounds like a convenient story, doesn't it? Maybe the lions just weren't that hungry. Maybe they had just been fed. Maybe that's what the King did—just fed the lions right beforehand hoping that they wouldn't eat Daniel. The King took matters into his own hands, huh?

If you read further in Daniel 6, the King, after Daniel wasn't eaten, took those guys that had convinced him to pass that law, and their families, and threw them into the lions' den, and we are told they were devoured before their bodies hit the floor. So it wasn't that these were just a bunch of drugged, sleepy lions. They were pretty hungry, but God shut their mouths because God took care of his own. God was his source of help.

As you and I want to stand firm in the Lord and serve the Lord faithfully, it's not going to happen if we try to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and say, "I can do it on my own." We need to find our help in God. We need to find our help in the tools God has given us—his Word and his Sacraments. We need to say, "God, strengthen me because I am weak. God, help me to understand what I can't understand. And God, when I'm not able to understand some of your incredible truths, help me to shut up and believe it and not keep questioning you as though I know more than you do. Let me serve you faithfully Lord, not because I am so good, but because you are so good. You have taken away my sins through the life and death of Christ. Let me serve you connected to that beautiful Gospel where my sins are forgiven—not by myself or by my efforts, but by my God. The God who shut the mouths of the lions' is the God who shuts the mouth of Satan, that roaring lion that wants to devour me. God, you have taken away the guilt of my sin and you have broken Satan's power hold over me."

Now we can serve God. Now we can stand firm in our trust in God and serve faithfully even though we are going to be attacked at times when we do so. It's going to happen. Jesus said so. So to say, "Well, I served God and then I was attacked, at times even by my fellow believers. They attacked what I did and what I said and I was just seeking to serve God faithfully and the attack was unjustified. So you know what? I'm not serving God anymore." No, God said to expect that. But he said "Stand firm in me."—which means "cover yourself in my Gospel and the Word and the Sacraments and then you will endure those things, and you will be able to stand firm to the end when you are clothed in the Gospel." Clothe yourself in your own feelings and your hurt feelings and your worries and your anxieties and you will become lion chow because you will become a cowardly lion and you will run away from God instead of running to him.

Both Daniel and Luther found their strength in God. They weren't better men than you or me. They might have had a stronger trust in God than you or me at times have, but the same source of strength is available to us that was available to them—the Gospel and the Word and the Sacraments. If we aren't connected to that, we will be lion chow.