

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Reformation Day
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Sermon by Pastor Daniel Gensmer
A Lair of Lions... no match for the LORD

¹⁰Now, 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. ¹¹Then these men came as a group and found Daniel praying and seeking favor from his God.

¹²They 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.”

¹⁶Then 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.” ¹⁷A 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. ¹⁸Then the king went to his palace. He spent the night without food, and no entertainment was brought before him. But he could not sleep.

¹⁹At dawn the king arose as soon as it was light and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰As 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?”

²¹Then Daniel spoke with the king. “Your Majesty, may you live forever! ²²My 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.”

²³Then 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 6:10-12, 16-23

You are being hunted, not attacked, hunted. What's the difference, though? If you're a hunter yourself, it's not as if you would announce to your family, “Honey, I am going out for a quick attack.” No, an attack can be sudden, but hunting takes time. You scheme. You plan. You watch. You wait. You learn your prey, what it does, where it goes. You circle it. You wait for just the right moment to spring the trap. That is what makes being hunted so frightening. The hunters aren't looking for a fight; they're searching for one singular fatal opportunity.

And this is exactly what happened to one man. They couldn't find anything wrong with him. His enemies searched his life and came up empty. So they watched their prey; they studied his faith, and they used his faith to set their trap. And they waited... Like a Lair full of Lions, until he did the very thing they knew he would do. Now who am I talking about? Daniel? Or Martin Luther? Because it could very easily be both.

One man was hunted by a pack of political officials who wanted him out of their way. The other was hunted by the church and political officials who demanded he recant what he had taught from God's Word. One knelt at the window of his home to pray. The other stood before the emperor at Worms and confessed.

Both knew the trap had been set. Both knew exactly what was at stake. Both had an opportunity to escape the hunters' trap. Just stop. Stop praying. Stop confessing. Stop saying what you know to be true. Keep quiet, and this lair of lions will leave you alone. But neither Daniel nor Luther gave in, because a **Lair of Lions, is no match for the LORD.**

But Daniel was in the Lair of Lions long before he was ever thrown into that Den. Because all these men, referenced here, were royal officials vying for the promotion of a lifetime. Right at the beginning of Chapter 6, we discover that King Darius “intended to promote Daniel so that he would be in charge of the entire kingdom.” Just like all the smear campaigns you've seen leading up to Election Day in a little over a week, those officials studied Daniel, looking for any dirt they could get against him to smear his reputation before the King, but they found nothing.

So, like a lair of lions, these officials gathered together to set their trap, because they were on the hunt, and Daniel was on the menu... "We will not find any accusation to bring against this Daniel unless we find something against him concerning the law of his God." These men were on the hunt. They studied their prey, and they discovered his faith. So now they set their trap as they approached King Darius. "Darius, Your Majesty, may you live forever! [we advise] the king to establish and enforce a decree that prohibits anyone to pray a prayer to any god or person for thirty days except to you, Your Majesty. Anyone who does so will be thrown into the den of lions."

Think about how tricky that trap is. They just buttered their king up like a biscuit. Although praying to a king might sound ridiculous to our ears, to a king from a culture that recognized hundreds of gods and saw their king as a son of the gods, this request was like music to his ears. How lucky Darius must have been to have officials that loved him so much that they wanted to have a whole month dedicated to Darius. Signing that decree was a no-brainer.

But as we turn to Daniel, he was fully aware this trap had been set. We are told right at the start of our reading that Daniel knew before he acted, "Now, when Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house... 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." He knew. He knew exactly what the decree said. He knew what would happen if he disobeyed. And he knew those lions were watching. Because this law had been designed with one person in mind: Daniel.

So what could Daniel do? He could stop. He could close the windows. He could pray somewhere else. He could pray quietly. Because this punishment wasn't just a slap on the wrist. He had a career, he had influence, he had a future. And all of that could disappear because of this one decision. Yet Daniel went home. He opened the windows toward Jerusalem. He knelt down, and he prayed and praised God as he had done before.

But why? It's not like God commanded Daniel to pray three times a day, on his knees, with his windows open toward Jerusalem. Well, it's not like Daniel couldn't pray differently... under different circumstances, that is. Think about it like this, Daniel had established his routine; he prayed 3 times a day, visibly, and out loud.

Before this moment, Daniel had the freedom to worship God however he wanted, but now that he was being forced to change, it was no longer an option, because changing his method of worship would have been an admission that Daniel did fear those lions far more than his LORD. Like Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, this was Daniel's "Here I stand, I can do no other" moment. But notice what Daniel is standing on. It's not his own courage. It's not even his confidence that God would rescue him from these lions. No, Daniel is standing on the LORD, because this **Lair of Lions is no match for the LORD**.

But do you have the same conviction as Daniel? Because you're being hunted. And your adversary is plotting your downfall. The Apostle Peter warns us, "Have sound judgement. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." The Devil is hunting you. He has studied your patterns, your faith, your flaws, and he wants to see you fail. The Devil is hunting you and he has set his traps. And those traps might not look like a personally tailored law issued by our government, but those moments you feel forced to fudge your faith are moments when the lion's trap has been set.

Maybe it's your boyfriend or girlfriend who wants to move in together, who wants to do things only a husband and a wife are supposed to do. Sure, you know that God's word doesn't mince itself when it comes to that marriage bed... "it is to be kept undefiled," not mostly pure. Undefiled. But the lion's trap has been set as the fear creeps in, *"If I don't do this, I'm going to lose her. If I don't move in, he's going to leave me."*

Maybe it's your friends and neighbors with completely different worldviews. You know what God's word says, but you also know what happens if you speak too clearly. So you soften it. You leave parts out. You gloss over those socially unacceptable portions of God's word that talk about the roles of men and women, that talk about the reality of hell, and that talk about the seriousness of sin.

The Devil prowls around like a lion in your life using everything at his disposal from your job to your reputation to convince you to fear his lair of lions more than the LORD.

Just stop. Stop being so serious about what God says. Stop letting your faith make your life difficult. Stop confessing. Stop living differently. Just give in this once and the lions will leave you alone. The Devil is not looking for a fight; he is waiting for that one fatal opportunity. And all he needs to do is make you afraid to live your life like you believe in God. But as vast as the Devil's lair of lions is, it is no match for the LORD.

Because as we return to Daniel and witness him on his knees praying to the LORD, knowing full well this may be his last prayer on earth, we witness that entire lair of lions spring into action. The trap had been set. Look at how God records these government officials in verse 11. "Then these men came as a group and found Daniel praying and seeking favor from his God." These men came as a group. Like a whole pack of lions pouncing on its prey, they piled into Daniel's home and surrounded him. The trap had worked.

But here's the irony: these men thought the real danger was waiting for Daniel in that den of lions. It wasn't. The lions could tear Daniel's body, but they couldn't tear him away from his LORD. The real danger was the lair that had been surrounding Daniel all along. The very men who wanted him to abandon his God. But this Lair of Lions was no match for the LORD. Because as Daniel confessed after surviving the night in the lions' den, "He was found innocent in God's presence." And Daniel had every reason to stand there innocent. Not because Daniel was perfect himself, but because the God he trusted had promised a Savior who was.

And Daniel's savior wasn't merely innocent, but perfect, and like Daniel, Jesus had his own lair of lions hunting him down. Jesus' enemies studied him, schemed against him, searched for an accusation they could use against him, and when they couldn't find anything wrong with him, they weaponized their own faith against him as they called Jesus a blasphemer for proclaiming himself to be the Son of God.

The Pharisees and religious leaders gathered around Jesus like a pack of lions. They sank their teeth into him with their accusations; their claws ripped through the flesh of his back as he was flogged, and they thought their prey had been defeated as they heard the crash of the stone sealing Jesus' lifeless body into the tomb. But as vicious as this lair of lions appeared, it was no match for the LORD. Because while Daniel merely walked out of that lair of lions unscathed, Jesus walked out of that tomb alive.

And maybe right now, you can feel the lions circling you. Seeking to strike. But look at what you already have! You have Jesus. You have a Savior who proved that no number of lions on the hunt could stop our LORD. And that matters because some of you have already been caught in the trap. You have chosen the relationship over God's Word. You kept silent when you should have spoken. You softened the truth because you were afraid of what others might think.

But your Savior doesn't look at you and say, "Try harder. Be more like Daniel." He says, "Look at me, look where you stand, you stand in my grace, you stand forgiven."

Jesus was hunted so that you now stand forgiven and innocent in God's eyes. He stood where you should have stood. He confessed the truth when you were afraid to confess it. He remained faithful when you were not. And he took the punishment your faltering faith deserved. And when Jesus walked out of that tomb, he proved that your sin, your guilt, and even your death cannot have the final word.

And don't get me wrong, the Devil is not done hunting. But when the fear surges, and you're tempted to compromise, you can have your own little "Here I stand, I can do no other" moment just like Daniel, and just like Luther. Because Christ has planted you on his Word, covered you with his righteousness, and made you his own.

By God's grace, you can say, "Here I stand. I can do no other." Not because you are fearless. Not because you are strong enough. But because you belong to your Lord Jesus. And whatever lair of lions lurks in your life, it is no match for the LORD.