

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Reformation Sunday
November 1, 2020
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
Stand firm in unchanging truth

—Daniel 6:10-12,16-23

What would you do? Imagine that a law has just been passed that says you are not free to worship your God. You can only pray to and praise the king. If you don't follow this law, if you do pray openly to your God, it is an offense punishable by death. What would you do? Would you do what you normally do? Would you bow your head and quietly pray before a meal at a restaurant? Would you praise and give glory to God when someone compliments you? Would you stroll into church like you did today? It's only for 30 days. You're not even being forced to worship a false god necessarily; you just can't worship your God, the true God. What would you do?

That sounds like a ridiculous situation, but that's exactly the situation Daniel was in in today's lesson. Daniel was among the capable young men of Judah that were brought to Babylon just before the fall of Jerusalem. By the time Daniel was tossed to the lions, he could have been as old as 80. Also he had a very high status; he was one of three officials or administrators in the kingdom. However, other officials who worked alongside or under Daniel wanted him out of the picture. They tried to find fault with him but couldn't find any. So they created one. They convinced the king to make a decree that everyone in the land could not pray to any god, except the king, for thirty days. It sounded good to the king so he signed and sealed the decree.

So what did Daniel do? ***“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.”*** That last phrase I just read really stuck out at me—Daniel did “just as he had done before.” When things took a dramatic change in Daniel's culture and when that change made it very difficult for him to worship his God Daniel didn't change anything! He stood firm in unchanging truth.

What would you do? It's hard to answer that question because we are not currently in the same exact situation Daniel was in. Many saints who have gone before have been physically persecuted for their faith. Many have died by the jaws of lions or by the swords of persecutor in history. And today Christians still die for their faith in other parts of the world. At least right now, that doesn't seem to be the threat we face. Maybe that's why this account of Daniel in the lion's den especially convicts us. I've changed the way I speak or behave in to conceal or downplay my faith when far less pressure has been applied. When the environment or situation has been less than favorable to the Christian faith I've been embarrassed and haven't given a clear confession of the truth even when the door was wide open. I'm sure if I were around in Daniel's day, I would have done a shamefully good job of escaping the lions' den in the first place.

The stakes were high for Daniel. Obviously his life was at stake but for Daniel, the stakes were much higher than his own life. Daniel was not taking a firm stance in human traditions; he wasn't merely fighting for his rights as a citizen. This was very personal to Daniel because it was about his God, his Savior. Daniel would rather fall into the lions' den and lose his life than fall away from his God and lose eternal life. For Daniel the stakes were eternal life through the only living God.

The stakes are just as high today for us as they were for Daniel. Keep in mind that our struggle as Christians and as a Christian church has never been against flesh and blood, but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12). The spiritual forces of evil in this world want to rip us away from faith in our God. The devil is at work in this world and he plays for keeps. But so does our God. Look at how he kept Daniel. He sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions. We can't see it with our eyes but the Lord sends his holy angels to protect his people. How many times have you and I been blissfully unaware of the evils that the Lord has kept from our bodies and souls because he sent his angels? God also kept him even before he was tossed to the lions. He preserved Daniel's faith and gave him courage to stand firm in the unchanging truth.

To be able to do the same, to stand firm as Daniel did, we need to remember what it is we are standing for. Daniel wasn't merely taking a firm stance for his personal preferences or rights. Martin Luther wasn't merely taking a firm stance in his own thoughts and ideas as he stood before the Diet of Worms. They stood firm in the unchanging truth of God's Word. They did not change that stance when pressure was applied because God's Word does not change. We take a firm stance in the unchanging truth of God's Word. We see the truth of that word challenged in our world in many ways. For example: what our society believes about the origin of the world and marriage and the value of human life. We stand up for each of truths and are called to give a clear testimony concerning those

truths. But remember the one core truth of the Bible to which all other biblical truths are tied—Salvation from sin and a right relationship with God come by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. That’s the ultimate truth in which we stand.

All Scripture revolves around that one truth. When you consider a Bible history lesson like this, it’s easy to focus solely on that person. But remember, you are not justified in God’s sight because you strive to be a modern-day Daniel. Daniel wasn’t even saved by being Daniel. Daniel was saved by his God, the living God who alone has saved all people from sin. Daniel’s faith looked to God his Savior. Scripture isn’t a random compilation of stories about different people. All of Scripture revolves around one person. In his Word God reveals a person who lived an even more upright life than Daniel. All of Scripture points to a person who suffered in a far greater way than Daniel. You think this world is hostile toward people like you and Daniel? Look at how the world treated Jesus. God spared Daniel from the lions. But God did not spare his only Son. He even kept silent when his Son cried out, “my God my God, why have you forsaken me.” I am the one God should have forsaken, for so shamefully lacking faith in him. But remember what the king asked Daniel when the stone was rolled away? He said, “**Has your God been able to rescue you?**” Our God is the God who rescues. My God is not only able to rescue, he has rescued me! And not from the jaws of lions, but from the jaws of hell. He has spared me and not from wrath of men but the wrath of God against our sin. This lesson about Daniel is so rich with God’s grace for sinners like you and me. Look what Daniel said to the king after his sleepover with the lions—“**They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in [God’s] sight...**” and not a scratch was found on Daniel “**because he had trusted in his God.**” That is the heart and core teaching of the Bible—by the grace of God sinners are found innocent in his sight through simple trust in God our Savior.

That is a truth worth dying for. And if the truth about Jesus is worth dying for it’s certainly worth living for. What does living in that gospel truth mean for Christians today? It’s not all that different than it was for Daniel. Certainly we’re in a different context but we live in the same ever-changing world. However, the truth of forgiveness through Jesus never changes. I think of Daniel as an even-keel kind of guy. He didn’t seem to be flustered by the shifting sands of his society. He didn’t despair and pack up and leave. Neither did he do anything crazy to stir up rebellion or to retaliate. He simply trusted in the Lord and he gave glory to God his Savior. When things changed in the world around him, nothing in his life of faith changed. Do you think our society still needs that stable, even-keel presence? Absolutely! What can we do as the world and the times are changing? Nothing different than what Christians have always done—stand firm in and confess the unchanging truth of Jesus Christ and his Word. When people learn that you are a Christians they might think in terms of all the different things we stand for or against on this issue or that issue. They might lump us in with man-made religions where they conceive God as vague or vindictive and it’s all about the rules. But in your life and in your testimony, show them what it’s all about. It’s about simple trust in God your Savior. It’s about Jesus who covers us with his perfection so that in God’s sight we are declared innocent. That is the truth in which we stand, by God’s grace. Amen.