



Daniel in the Lion's Den



By Kevin Antonio Smallwood

August 4, 2019
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

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DANIEL 6; PSALM 149; LUKE 6:20-26

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Every time I hear the martyr story of Daniel and the Lion's den, I am taken to a place of wondering what it would be like to be in a den with a lion. Not only is there the presence of a mighty feline but also a closed space with no way out. The amount of panic and fear that would spring up from the uncertainty of what might happen next, the frantic wondering of whether or not life was about to end. And yet, today we gathered to continue in faith with the witness literature of Daniel, a servant of the Lord who perseveres in prayer by faith.

The story tells us that Daniel was not only experiencing an attack on his life by the Lion but also by those who were closing in on him setting up traps to make him fail, and attempting to spread false witness about him just for the sake of evil. Daniel experienced the pressure of wickedness closing in on him fast, and he shows us how to respond to it by persevering in faithfulness to the One who fights for us.

Each and every day we wake and rise to the reality that we are being pursued by the existences of sin, death, and the forces of oppression, including those who preserve them. This reality is also revealed to us in the Book of Daniel, where he is conspired against by those in positions of power and thrown into what basically is an execution chamber. What is the response to the presence of such brute force of falsehood? How do we engage with those who are working hard to destroy the respect and integrity of our human connection?

We do what Daniel did, he challenged the system, a system that was hijacked and altered to ensure that he would face the death penalty. Daniel's challenge to the powers at play were steeped in his faithfulness to God in prayer and character. You see when they tried to take Daniel down, it was not possible because he was a person of integrity, an integrity that is rooted in the same God we come to worship, to love, and to learn from. God is Daniel's ultimate defense against persecution, and Daniel knew this which is why when he returned to his prayer room, he continued to pray three times a day to our God whose faithfulness to us precedes our existence.

The beauty of Daniel and the Lion's Den is that it is a continuation of what God shows us each and every day, which is loving faithfulness, and how we respond to it, not only in the face of evil, but also in our joys and celebrations. We stand firm, just as Daniel did, we cling to our reading of Holy Scripture, our gathering in worship, and our communal and private prayer lives. Daniel's feet are firmly planted on the ground when he is confronted, he continues to pray, he does not stop. He models for us the practice of being in relationship with God, a relationship that began out of God's grace and love for us and all of creation.

It's this kind of grace that carries us through the loss of a family member, the kind of grace that stands with us when we are confronted by powers that be which aim to corrupt and distort our institutions. It is this kind of grace and faithfulness that comes from God, which is so victorious in action that it prompts Daniel to keep trusting, and to keep moving forward into a deeper relationship with God.

God is not far off from the dangers that are following Daniel, He is in fact ever-present to the point of closing the mouth of the Lion to safeguard his child. What a great and victorious God we have who says that not even the mightiest attacks of fear and danger which surround us shall have the last word. We sometimes are not able to see how victorious our God is when we awake and rise to each new day to what seems to be an ever-increasing state of fear of our neighbor and attacks on the respect and dignity of every human being and creation.

We are over-exposed to media sources that seem to only reveal this kind of hatred and ignorance, which are not new to the history of humanity, we even see in Daniel that the authorities are motivated by evil thoughts and deeds. This is no new reality, the reality of our human frailty and how we are vulnerable to enacting deeds of wickedness, but what is new each and every day, what is renewed and refreshed just as the morning dew is God's loving faithfulness to us. It is this faithfulness that is given to us as a gift of love, which guides us to make choices, just as we chose to rise and make our way to this sanctuary of prayer.

Daniel encourages us to persevere in the face of uncertainty, to keep fast to our faith in the pursuit of truth, and to maintain a prayer life that is steeped in relationship with God. Even when we may not be able to see immediate release from these times of trial, even when we are overcome with loss in our lives, or disappointment, or any struggle that may affect us personally or someone we love.

We must continue to hold onto our relationship with God and with one another, in doing so we maintain our Christian integrity, just as Daniel did, an integrity of faithfulness that we can extend to every person we meet, even when that person may be a challenge to the very values we receive from our faith in Jesus Christ, even then must we stand firm.

For our God has and will shut the Lion's mouth and protect us from fake news, our God has and will continue to be with us even when things around us are destroyed like the temple of Solomon was, our God has and will enact a plan to stop the Pharaoh who pursues the people just as He did to liberate the Israelites. Our God has and will show us how victorious He is just as he did in providing David with the means to overcome Goliath.

As we approach the altar in remembrance and celebration of our Savior we shall approach it with the knowledge that no matter what lies the Lion is yelling in our ears, God provides us with the way, the truth, and the life in Christ Jesus. Do not let the Lion tell you that you are not worthy, or that it is easier to give up than to believe that we might see a change in the world. Do not let the Lion convince you that lies and the ways of injustice are the ways that we are supposed to live.

NO not at all, rather stand firm as Daniel did, wait for the Lord and Bless the one who rescues us from sin and death. Give all praise to the one who fights for us during times of worry and confusion, fear and hatred, injustice and corruption. Our God who calls us into a faithful relationship, who places meaning in our lives and offers us the way to forgiveness and reconciliation. It is no easy task to do, life is hard, but God is good. Pray to God daily, as Daniel did, and we shall continue to know and see that God's faithfulness to us endures from age to age.

Amen.