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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 1, 2020
Reformation Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Galatians 5:1-6, Matthew 10:16-23

Hymns: 239; 261; 774; 50:1-2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

¹¹ Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. ¹² And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?"

The king answered and said, "The thing *is* true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."

¹⁶ So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast *him* into the den of lions. *But* the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."

¹⁷ Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

¹⁸ Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. ¹⁹ Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. ²⁰ And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to

Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.”

²³ Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Blessings of the Reformation.

There are so many blessings we can highlight as we look back to the time of the Reformation, and specifically the life of Martin Luther. We recall the trials of conscience that tormented Luther when he was a monk. We also recall how the Spirit led Luther to the truth of God’s Word by opening Luther’s understanding of the righteousness of God, and the Lord’s decree that the just shall live by his faith. Just the fact that the Lord led Luther back to the **Scriptures** as the **sole authority for faith and life**, leads us to the foundations of true faith in Christ crucified.

From that starting point Luther taught us the importance of understanding that we are saved by **grace alone**, and that all the merits of Christ are possessed by us **through faith alone**, this faith being worked in our hearts as a gift of the Holy Spirit. We have Bibles in our homes because of Luther’s emphasis on the laity reading the Scriptures. We have the Small Catechism presenting in a concise form the chief parts of Christian doctrine as fathers ought to teach them to their children. We have the singing of hymns -- hymns of faith -- that is so precious to us. The list goes on and on.

However, this morning we will be reminded that all these things didn't come about without resistance from the devil and the powers of this evil world. Luther faced many trials and tribulations in life that severely tested him. He was ordered to renounce his writing, or suffer the consequences. Luther was under great pressure from the powers of this world, and he would not recant. Luther would not go against Scripture that informed and directed his conscience. Luther saw going against conscience as being far more dangerous than to be declared "outlaw" by Emperor Charles of the Holy Roman Empire. Through many trials and tribulations, involving dangers from men as well as dangers from an epidemic of the black plague, Luther found direction and strength from the Word of God.

Luther was hardly the first to endure such tribulations for the gospel's sake. We know the apostles all faced persecution and imprisonment, and, for most, ultimately martyrdom for Jesus' name sake. In recent years we have received many reports from Christian brethren across the globe of trials and persecution that are commonly faced in our day, with some of the members of churches **with whom we are affiliated** losing their **lives** for Jesus' name sake.

It may well be that the devil will change his tactics in our own country, abandoning the more subtle attacks upon our faith, using open aggression against those who hold to the truth of the gospel. It has already begun in other free democracies, not only India, but also in Australia and Canada pastors have been sent to jail accused of hate crimes, for preaching the truth of God's Word in their presentation of law and gospel.

We should be prepared to face persecution in any form, and find our strength to remain faithful to God and His Word from the same source as those who have gone before us, whose record of faithfulness has been recorded for us by the Holy Spirit. This morning we will turn to the life of the Prophet Daniel seeking to learn perseverance in faith from Daniel examining how he endured persecution. It is good and right for us to tie this lesson to the stalwarts of the Reformation. It was from Holy Scripture that they learned --

THEME: Reformation Perseverance in Faith.

The Holy Spirit presents the example of Daniel for --

I. Facing Persecution with Faith.

The back story to our text is important. Daniel had enemies who were jealous of Daniel's position of influence with the King. They wanted to find fault with Daniel, and yet Daniel was faithful in all his duties. So they conspired to trick the king into making a decree they hoped Daniel would not observe. They appealed to the king's vanity to make a decree that everyone must pray only to King Darius for the next thirty days, or be thrown into the lions' den where they would most certainly be killed.

So how would Daniel respond to this decree? Would he obey the decree and violate the law of God? It is easy to imagine that many would cave in to such pressure, and likely did. Very likely many others did not obey the King, but remained faithful and worshiped God. However, those people would not have interested Daniel's enemies. Their interest was in Daniel. So should Daniel continue in prayer, but shut his windows to any outsiders' observation. Wouldn't we find that alternative attractive? But that was not Daniel's custom in prayer. While Daniel didn't flaunt his spiritual life by going to the town square for prayer hour, he was accustomed to praying by his open window, facing Jerusalem where the temple of God had once stood. Daniel didn't change anything. He maintained his prayer life as he had before. The testimony of Daniel's life remained clear. He did not fear what man could do to him.

One can only imagine how delighted Daniel's enemies were as they reported Daniel's transgression to King Darius and pressured him to obey his own law, and sentence Daniel to be thrown into the lion's den. It was the king's hope that Daniel's God would be able to deliver him. Daniel was thrown in with the lions, and the lions' den was closed with a large stone and the stone sealed with the king's seal, and the signets of the king's lords. From man's perspective there was no possible escape or deliverance for Daniel.

Daniel faced persecution with faith. He served God. He prayed to God and worshiped the Lord openly. Daniel didn't even cower a

bit. He placed his life in the hands of the living God. Think about it? Would we have the courage to behave with such faith and trust in God? Wouldn't we be tempted to suspend our worship of God for the thirty day period, or at least leave the windows closed so other's wouldn't observe our worship? I am sure I would be tempted to cower. I would not trust myself, but would have to lean on Jesus' name and the sure promises of God.

The Apostle Paul reminds us of God's faithfulness and the wonder of Jesus' love. These familiar words would serve us well in times of trial: "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or **persecution**, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*" ³⁶ *As it is written:*

*"For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."*

³⁷ *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,* ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:35-39)

Trials and tribulations and persecutions shall come. As we stated earlier, the trials that are faced by our Christian brothers and sisters in the rest of the world may come to us also, and sooner than one might think. Then we will need to have our faith and confidence in God, and not in our own strength of will and determination. Let us remember what Paul also said, "*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*" ³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* (Romans 8:31) Our hope, our confidence is in God, not simply because the Lord is almighty and with God nothing shall be impossible, but also because of the depth of His love for us. When facing persecution what shall we say? "**If God is for us who can be against us,**" because He loved us enough to send His Son to suffer and die and rise again and give us the assurance of everlasting life in His name. If God was not only able, but willing to do *this*, then He will be there for us in every trial or tribulation. After all the Lord promises "*I will never leave you or forsake you!*" (Hebrews 13:5)

Daniel went to the Lion's den --

II. Trusting in God's Deliverance.

Daniel's faith in God was not in vain. Daniel was not put to shame in his trust in the Lord. More importantly, the Lord was not put to shame in Daniel's hour of need. King Darius ran to the lion's den at first light and had it thrown open and, hoping against hope, called out to Daniel, "*Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?*" (v.20)

The gods of the Medes and Persians were idols of wood and stone; they were not alive. Darius recognized that the Lord, the God of Daniel, and your God and mine as well, a God who is not seen with the eye, is still far more real than one cast of metal, or chiseled out of stone. **Our God is the living God!**

Daniel answered Darius from the lion's den. Just hearing Daniel's voice must have been a shock as much as a relief.

Daniel 6:21-23 "Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! ²²My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."

²³Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, **because he believed in his God.**"

The gift of faith is a special gift indeed. The power of faith in our lives should not be taken for granted. It should be nurtured with the gospel, and cherished. It is all we have in times of trial, tribulation, and persecution. Then we may call upon the name of the Lord, trusting in God's deliverance.

Daniel's experience was not unique. We can point to others who were delivered from harm and danger. The Scripture contains many such accounts. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, Daniel's friends, were delivered from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. In the days of King Hezekiah he prayed for the Lord to deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians, and that night the angel of

the Lord killed 185 thousand of Sennacherib's army. The Apostle Paul writes of his own deliverance from imprisonment in Rome: *"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. ¹⁸And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!"* (2 Timothy 4:17-18)

Our flesh would tempt us to think, "Oh, but that was different!" It isn't so different. We have the same God, and the same Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. We have the same promises of God that He will stand by us. We have the same strength that moved Daniel to worship boldly, that strengthened Stephen to forgive those who stoned him as Stephen was received into the glory of heaven. We have **the Lord** who empowered the preaching of Paul.

We have the same Lord who encouraged Martin Luther in the days of the Reformation, well after the days of biblical times, and actually much closer to our own time. Luther was emboldened not by his character, but by his God. Luther confessed, *"A mighty fortress is our God, A trusty shield and weapon!"* And also in that battle hymn of the Reformation we shall sing, *"He's by our side upon the plain with His good gifts and Spirit."* (Worship Supplement 2000, 774)

These aren't just fine sounding words, but empty of power. This is the confession of the true and living God who has called us to faith in His Son, and so called us to be glorified with Jesus in heaven. This is the God of our salvation! May another of Luther's prayers which we already sang this morning continue to be our prayer!

1. "Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.

2. "Lord Jesus Christ, Thy pow'r make known,
For Thou art Lord of lords alone;
Defend Thy Christendom that we

May evermore sing praise to Thee.

3. “O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth.
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 261)

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep
your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.