**Daniel 6:10-12,16-23** November 1, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Reformation Sunday

**…Because God Said So**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Daniel in the Lion’s Den is a precious story. It’s one of the first Bible stories children learn in Sunday School. How beautifully God cares for his people! God is more powerful than anyone we will ever face! We love the picture of the angel, the only light in the darkness of the lion’s den; and Daniel just sitting there, unworried.

That is the reading for this Reformation Day sermon, but we are going to focus on what happened before Daniel was tossed into the lion’s den. I read the focus of this sermon, the first three verses of our Old Testament reading:

***Daniel 6:10-12***

*10Now when Daniel learned that the decree [prohibiting the worship of the God of Israel] 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. 11Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions’ den?” The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed”…*

Reformation has long been portrayed as a battle. And it is. The original Reformation Day is the story of a man who could no longer keep his conscience quiet. Informed by the truth of the Word of God, he could not let the lies persist within the Christian Church unchallenged. He had heard, he had read God speaking through the Bible, and he had to tell others what he had heard. He had to tell them that only God’s grace, his undeserved love, given in our Savior Jesus Christ, can save us. He had to tell others that this becomes ours simply through faith, through simple trust that God’s oh-so-simple, almost simplistic, way is the way of salvation. That man realized that the only way he or we can know this is through God’s Word. These things are not up for discussion, they are truth. *Any* compromise in this God-revealed truth is falsehood, a lie. And Martin Luther had to say so.

The Old Testament prophet Daniel, of our reading, felt the conviction of the same things. He knew that this was about eternity. When eternity hangs in the balance, it is a struggle even greater than life and death. At least to my ears, the sturdy, stirring words and tunes of “In Trembling Hands” and “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” these capture the feel of Reformation Day maybe better than any preacher’s sermon. They capture the attitude of Daniel’s heart when he was tempted to compromise on truth.

Pressure to compromise comes from many directions. The pressure Daniel felt came from the state. Yet it wasn’t really about governmental persecution of religion. Daniel was an exiled Jew. As a young man, almost a boy, he had been forcibly marched off from Israel to distant Babylon. There he had entered government service and advanced steadily. At the time of our reading, he was an old man at the highest level of the Persian Empire. He was one of the three at the highest level of the empire’s bureaucracy and he had the king’s ear. Political ambitions being what they are, others plotted to get Daniel’s place. They duped the king into enacting a law that they knew Daniel would break, and that law would carry the death sentence if he were to break it. The law was that no one pray to anyone except the king for thirty days. Of course, this was an utterly foolish law, but it appealed to the absolute monarch’s ego. So, he made it.

So Daniel is faced with a choice: He could pray to the God of Israel and die; or he could skip church for four weeks and live. Which would you do?

For Daniel, there was no question. ***“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.”***

Manly restraint defines Daniel, like the bedrock you build skyscrapers on. A bull-headed, stubborn man perhaps would have had a word with the king, or let the schemers hear about it. No, Daniel did not do that. There is no aggressive, “I’m going to show them” which is as sure a way as any to put oneself in the wrong.

But neither was Daniel a coward. Hearing the king’s edict, he didn’t reflect, “Hmmm, going home for lunch and a prayer could get me killed. I’ll have lunch with the guys today. Let me think about this for a day or two and figure out the prudent thing to do.”

After he heard the king’s command, Daniel acted ***“just as he had done before.”*** Those are surely some of the most important words of our reading: ***“just as he had done before.”*** Daniel had served his God consistently throughout his life, and he would not stop now.

But remember this: he did not know that God was going to save him. We sometimes think that people like Daniel in the Bible just knew God would pull a miracle out of the hat and save them – that’s what God did in Bible times, right? That’s not how it worked. Read the Old Testament carefully and you will hear about prophets who died while faithfully speaking the word of God. In the book of Acts, chapter 12, the Apostle Peter was on death row (and in those days when you were on death row, you waited hours or days, not years) and an angel came into the prison and delivered Peter to freedom. Years later Peter was again arrested. This time he was executed. God gets to decide when he will save and when not. And here in the reading, Daniel did not know whether God would call him to eternity or rescue him for a few more years.

But it did not matter to Daniel. He would serve his faithful God, ***“just as he had done before.”*** He opened the windows of his upstairs room, he knelt down, faced toward Jerusalem and prayed giving thanks to God! The details of Daniel’s prayer are not requirements of prayer. And yet, each detail tells us something important.

Daniel prayed with open windows. In the cheek to jowl living quarters of ancient cities, Daniel did not hide the fact that he prayed to the God of Israel. Open windows mean that people knew what you were doing. He was not embarrassed by God, or afraid of what troubles his faith could bring him. His relationship with God was the most important thing in his life. He could not hide it any more than a child can hide his affection for his parent. (This calls to mind some of the more embarrassing moments for me as a kid. Just about always, when we went out to eat in a restaurant—which wasn’t often!—my dad would say, “Let’s pray before we eat.” And then, right there in the restaurant, our family would say our mealtime prayers, not loudly, but publicly. What could I say? I was often embarrassed, but deep down in my heart of hearts I knew that to be ashamed of praying is to be ashamed of God. And while eventually we kids figured out the way around it was to ask Dad, “Can we pray by ourselves,” and dad would usually let us, my conscience would then bother me that I had been ashamed of my faith.) Daniel prayed ***“just as he had done before.”*** He wouldn’t hide his relationship with his God.

Daniel also ***“got down on his knees”*** when he prayed. (By the way, Daniel was at least seventy years old at this point.) Kneeling indicated the humble attitude of his heart.

He prayed ***“three times a day.”*** He prayed frequently and would not skip his prayers even to save his life.

One last feature that we ought to specially note is that he prayed ***“toward Jerusalem.”*** Why pray toward Jerusalem? Why not Mt. Sinai? After all Mt. Sinai was where Moses came down with the two tablets of the Law. Sinai was the place where God made a covenant with Israel. Why Jerusalem? Because Jerusalem was the place where daily sacrifice for sin had been made, and where in a few short years, in a rebuilt temple, sacrifice would be made again. In facing Jerusalem, Daniel showed that his faith was based on God’s mercy and forgiveness.

And so it was that on day one of the emperor’s 30-day edict, Daniel’s rivals entered his residence and found him kneeling, praying to his God. Overjoyed that they could get rid of him, they were probably a bit surprised at how easy it was to get rid of Daniel. If anyone had bothered to ask him why in the world he was praying when he knew well and good that it would get him killed, I imagine he would have said, “Because God Said So…”

So where is it that you are feeling the pressures to compromise on your God? For Daniel, in this reading, it was the state. Where do you feel pressure on your faith. Is it the state, society, work, friends?

We ought to spend a little time in self-examination on this point. What is it that keeps us from doing what God expects? Have you begun that process of compromise to maintain your reputation in the world, your standing with the boss, your place in the crowd, your personal comfort?

As recently as the last presidential election, there was a Wisconsin Synod member who had been a member of the US House of Representatives. She made a bid as one of that slough of presidential candidates in 2016. But first she had been sure to sever her ties with the Wisconsin Synod. After all, that would have been radioactive to have it revealed on the national stage that she belonged to a church body that refused to ordain women pastors, that sticks to the biblical teaching of the roles of men and women. Compromise.

A few weeks ago in confirmation class we had a discussion about a true-false question in the workbook. “True or False: Christians will have more money than unbelievers.” It seems like they should, right? But we also remembered that Christians give some of their money as offerings to God while non-Christians get to keep it all. Some Christians aren’t willing to work and make time-and-a-half every Sunday because God means more than money to them. And hopefully Christians aren’t as willing to bend the rules to please their boss and get the promotion as some others. “False” – in fact it might just happen that some Christians will have less than unbelievers specifically because they act like Christians.

And, to be honest, I have little idea of the many tricks and trials that young Christians now face in their digital lives, times when Satan, the world and their sinful flesh are working on them to compromise or to throw in the towel. Times when there is pressure to ditch God’s ancient revelation for the freedom of modern thinking.

Where do you feel the pressures to compromise? Is it morals? Is it in financial matters? Is it in your time, talents and treasures given to your God?

The first steps of compromise seem so little, so insignificant. We can get by on worship every other week. Wouldn’t it be easier just to wink on this or that teaching of the Bible? Why draw unwanted attention to our faith?

Dear Lord, make us Daniels. Make us Christians who regularly face toward Jerusalem, the place where the one sacrifice for sin for all time was made. Remind us that the only place we can find reconciliation with you our Creator—and also our Judge—is at the cross of Jesus, just outside the city gates, at Mount Calvary.

Make us Daniels, who have a resolve not our own. Especially in this year when everything seems to be slouching toward ruin, we ask God to reinvigorate us, to give us a strength and zeal that we cannot call up within ourselves. We pray as hymn 405 sings, *“Oh, for a faith that will not shrink though pressed by many a foe… That bears unmoved the world’s dread frown, Nor heeds its scornful smile.”* Yes, Lord, strengthen our backs, make us stand straight to bear the scornful smile of the world, the disapproval of all who would say that teaching the purity of the Bible is just being nitpicky and divisive, or old-fashioned and out-of-touch.

And, Lord, gather us together in this congregation. For here in the company of our fellow Christians we find the encouragement to stand in these times. Make us willing to do what you say, just because you our saving God said so. Amen.