

Sunday 14th February 2021

Daniel 6: 1-28 (Facing persecution)

Talk by Laura Polaine, Prayers by Margaret Davies

Good morning and welcome to St Johns on-line reflection. Today, we will be focusing on Daniel 6:1-28. First, Margaret will read the prayers.

Prayers

We come to God knowing that we let Him down, Let us confess to God with the words of David from Psalm 51:-

"For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me; against you I have sinned and done what is evil in your sight. Cleanse me and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a pure heart and renew a right spirit within me", Amen.

We know that Jesus the Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world. Thank you Lord for dying for us and forgiving us, Amen

Last Sunday our service concluded with the hymn, " Lord for the Years". It is also a wonderful prayer to base our prayers round today.

*Lord for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.*

Yes, Lord, we thank and praise you for pardoning us through Jesus' death. We count our many blessings of life, like health, homes, families and friends, food and clothes and warmth in this cold weather. Thank you, Lord for your provision.

*Lord, for that word, the word of life which frees us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.*

Yes, Lord, your words in the Bible that we read and hear, inspired by your Holy Spirit, will sustain us when facing trials, that God is with us, is in control and will deliver us. We need to trust and obey you especially at this time of pandemic, isolation and in our world situation. Help us to listen to your word each day.

*Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care
for young and old, for common wealth and nation,*

Yes, Lord, as we thank you for our nation, we pray especially for all those in leadership. Give our government the wisdom to deal with the coronavirus and vaccination rollout. Give ministers solutions to the economics so that people's livelihoods can be maintained. We thank you Lord for the provisions through food banks, grants and health care. We pray that all those in need get essential help. Bless all those working in medicine and care and essential key workers who keep the country going. Give them the strength, energy and mental support they need.

*Lord, for our world when we disown or doubt him,
Loveless in strength and comfortless in pain,
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him:
Lord of our world, we pray that Christ may reign.*

Yes, Lord, we pray for many places in the world where there is conflict and war. We pray that dominant leaders and governments will work towards peace and unity. Bring rescue to those affected by disasters like the flooding and earthquakes. Give refugees and homeless the shelter, food and support they need. May all the relief agencies, Christian and mission partners have all the equipment and your love to give. We pray especially for Jason and Tracey Day in Thailand. They ask for prayer for the people who have lost so much because of lack of tourists and that they can share the love of Christ through their lives.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us

Yes, Lord, we pray for our church. Thank you for the fellowship we have albeit at a distance. Thank you for our wardens Ian and Steve, our preachers and leaders. Thank you for the food bank, CAP, Amaze Penge, the Alpha course and our homegroups. Give us your Holy spirit to power us to live and work to your glory. We pray for the right person to answer the advertisement for our new vicar. The person that you call and to take on the merger of our church with Holy trinity.

So many people amongst us are in need of healing, Lord. We pray for Val, Karim's father, Audrey, Anthony, Nigel's son's families, Zak, Lorraine and others known to you. Comfort those who are bereaved and strengthen the frail, weak and stressed.

*Lord, for ourselves, in living power remake us
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us, for the future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.*

Amen, amen.

Reading

Our reading today is taken from Daniel, chapter 6 verses 1-28 - New International Version (NIV)

Daniel 6 New International Version (NIV) – ‘Daniel in the Den of Lions’

6 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, ² with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

⁶ So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! ⁷ The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. ⁸ Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” ⁹ So King Darius put the decree in writing.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So 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 human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

¹³ Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” ¹⁴ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

¹⁵ Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

²¹ Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

²⁴ At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: "May you prosper greatly!

²⁶ "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

"For he is the living God
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.

²⁷ He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.

He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions."

²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Talk

In Daniel 6 we see the stories concerning Daniel's activities in the foreign courts come to a close. He is still in the same city of Babylon, but there is a new empire with Babylon replaced by Persia. As in the last chapter Belshazzar is dead, and king Darius the Mede is in control. Daniel is now over 80 years old and one of Darius's top three administrators. The role of an administrator was to oversee the work of the satraps who were the provincial rulers responsible for security and collection of tribute. Daniel's working is more efficient and capable than the others, and Darius in seeing this is so impressed that he wants to promote Daniel to have oversight of the entire kingdom. Daniel has earned Darius' respect through his hard work, but at the same time, he has made enemies. The other administrators and satraps are jealous of him, and they plot to bring him down. Perhaps you can relate this to a work situation or something similar where you may have seen jealousy shown by co-workers or have been on the receiving end. How are we to respond to this?

In the case of Daniel, the satraps and administrators struggled to find something that would trip up Daniel, as in verse 4. 'They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent'. The only way they could do so was to attack his religion and they persuaded the king to come up with the decree to ban people worshiping anyone else other than the king himself for thirty days, with the penalty if found guilty of breaking this law to be thrown in the lions' den. So what is Daniel's response to this? We see he continues to do what he always had, and that is to pray three times a day to his God in his room with the window open.

Daniel neither parades his faith nor hides it in his prayers, he just quietly and consistently prays to God. Talking to God is inextricably linked with trusting in him and to trust God is to have immeasurable peace. Fellowship with God was the number one priority in Daniel's life. He continued to pray as he always had done. He refused to compromise. Daniel was what Paul (in Timothy 3:2) would call 'without reproach' and is an example to us how to act in our work or every day living. Of course, this will not always save us from attacks, and like Daniel we are to rely on God for protection. If we have jealous critics because of our faith, we can be glad it is that rather than another part of our lives. As with Daniel, perhaps they have focussed on our religion as a last resort. We are called to continue to believe and live as we should, remembering that God is in control, fighting this battle for us.

Daniel had a disciplined prayer life, and continued to pray because he could not look to the king for the guidance and strength that he needed during this difficult time. Only God could provide what he really needed. It is a reminder to us of the importance of prayer, and whilst it is not always easy for us to find the time to pray, we sometimes get interrupted by the pressure of our busy schedules, prayer is our lifeline to God. In the Alpha Film on prayer, it discusses the question of how to pray, and one suggestion is to 'keep it simple, keep it honest, and keep it going'.

When the administrators and satraps gave word to the king that Daniel had disobeyed the king's decree, the king realised he had been tricked by them in setting up the decree. In Babylon the king's word was law, and in the Medo-Persian Empire, when a law was made, even a king could not change it. Whilst Darius was an effective government administrator, he had a fatal flaw – pride, which the administrators used to their advantage. The king did not want to put Daniel in the lion's den, but now he could not prevent it, and we see he hopes that Daniel's God can save him. "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" Lions roamed the countryside and forests in Mesopotamia at this time, and the people both feared them and respected their power. The Persians would capture lions and keep them in parks feeding and attending to them.

In the early morning of the following day of Daniel's ordeal, the king hurried to the den to check on him. Here we see the contrast of the king who had not slept being worried about Daniel, compared to Daniel who had been protected and who came out of the pit unharmed. The Angel of the Lord had been with Daniel and kept him safe. What seemed the impossible had happened. God has ways of delivering people that none of us can imagine. In verse 22 Daniel's response is 'May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.' Whilst Darius is the most powerful human in the world, he has no power to save Daniel. Darius is trapped in his own law. But Daniel's faith is founded on a person who is more powerful than the king. God himself. Later in verse 26 Darius gives the implicit admission that his own power is limited, while the living God and his kingdom is above all. Nebuchadnezzar had come to believe that Israel's God was real because of the faithfulness of Daniel and his friends.

Darius was also convinced of God's power because Daniel was faithful and God rescued him. God was faithful in Daniel's life – delivered him from a den of lions, and from the enemies who hated him. Daniel did not just get by with his faith – he prospered. Although Daniel was captive in a strange land, his devotion to God was a testimony to powerful rulers. Today Daniel is presented to us as an example of faith under duress. We are also called in our lives to testify about God's power in our lives and to be faithful to God so he can use us to make an impact on others whether through words or in practical ways. In facing trials – we can expect God to also be with us through them. God will take care of us. We can trust God to be with us through any trial. May God grant us similar courage like Daniel to remain faithful under pressure. Because he has been faithful to us, we are to remain faithful to him. Corrie Ten Boom said the following about faith: 'Faith sees the invisible, believes the unbelievable and receives the impossible'.

Daniel now safe, the king has Daniel's accusers thrown in the lions' den. This was in accord with the common principle in the ancient Near East that anyone who made false charge against someone else should be punished by receiving the same fate they had sought for their victim, along with their families. Evil deeds often backfire on those who plan cruelty.

In Proverbs 28:10 it says 'He who leads the upright along an evil path will fall into his own trap. But the blameless will receive good inheritance.'

As we stand back and reflect on Daniel 6, the whole story seems to foreshadow the last period of Jesus' life. When Christ descended into our pit, on the cross, he endured what Daniel was spared. In Nicky Gumbel's BIOY it is illustrated as follows:

1. Jealousy led to false accusations against Jesus
2. His enemies were unable to find any basis for a charge
3. In the end they resorted to a religious charge
4. A reluctant and weak king was persuaded to take some action he did not really want to take
5. The great courage of Daniel foreshadowed the resurrection
6. Even the empty tomb seems to be foreshadowed. A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den'.

The mighty Lord becomes meek to exalt the humble in sending his son to die on the cross. He is the Servant who rises to topple the proud. In Daniel we see the proud opposed and the humble lifted. In chapter 2 we see mighty empires with feet of clay, a proud ruler humbled and restored in chapter 4, and the 'writing on the wall' for an arrogant king in chapter 5.

We are reminded in Acts 2: 24 that Jesus was put to death nailed to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Because of this we can see the power that allows us to risk all for our faith. Jesus has not only gone into the lions' den, and emerged unscathed, but he has died and been raised again. Death has been swallowed up in victory. We are particularly reminded of our brothers and sisters in many countries that face persecution for their faith and we need to pray for them and the organisations that help persecuted Christians prayerfully, pastorally and practically.

The key to the whole story is Daniel's complete trust in God. The complete trust made him fearless in facing persecution. He served God continually and was recognized and thought of as a servant of the living God. He was at God's disposal every moment of the day. We are encouraged to resist the pressure to compromise, and to keep trusting God even when everything seems to go wrong. To have the courage to be different. God who delivered Daniel, will deliver you.

To close, the king's decree:

NLT ²⁶ "I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel.

For he is the living God,
and he will endure forever.
His kingdom will never be destroyed,
and his rule will never end.
²⁷ He rescues and saves his people.

Let us pray:

Lord help us to keep walking in an intimate relationship of connection with you – thanking you, talking to you and trusting in you. Help us to be faithful in our work and most importantly in our relationship with you.

Amen

Closing Prayer:

God, give us eyes of faith,
That we may choose your way
In the face of so many choices this week
Help us to believe in your promise
And to respond to your calling
In Jesus' name

Amen