

REFORMATION SUNDAY

First German Evangelical Lutheran Church

Do You Have What It Takes?

Daniel 6:10-12; 16-23

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 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 The king answered, "The decree stands-- in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den.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, "O 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, O king."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.

What is the scariest think that you have ever done? When people are asked about their greatest fears in life, very often the number one response is public speaking. It can be scary to stand up in front of a group of people and talk. It takes a lot of guts. It takes courage. Perhaps even more frightening than speaking in front of people is speaking *your faith* in front of people. What you believe is a very sensitive topic. People could make fun of you or laugh at you for what you have to say. Standing up for the truth of God's Word takes a lot of guts. It takes a lot of courage. Today, as we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation, we appreciate the great amount of courage it took for Luther to

stand up to the religious and political leaders of his day and speak the truth of God's Word. Then the question is: do you have what it takes to do the same thing?

In our Old Testament reading today, we see a situation that required a lot of guts from our hero, Daniel. In the first verse of our reading Daniel finds out that a decree has been published. What is this decree all about? Remember who Daniel was. He was a Jew living in exile in Babylon. The king, Darius, had set up 120 satraps to govern throughout the kingdom. Over those satraps were three administrators. One of them was Daniel. Daniel did such a good job that the king was about to place him over the whole kingdom. The other satraps and advisors really didn't like the thought of this foreigner having such a prominent role in the kingdom. They were jealous of Daniel so they devised a plan. They were very aware of Daniel's devout faith and his practice of praying every day to his God. So they had the king issue a decree that for a month no one could pray to anyone other than the king, under the penalty of death. This is the decree that Daniel learned about.

How was he going to react? What would he do? What would you do in that situation? Would you keep on praying to God openly and face a death sentence? Would you rationalize praying secretly to God so that you could save your life? After all, there is no direct command from God that you must pray three times a day in front of the window. It would be a very difficult decision. You might know in your heart what the right thing to do is, but would you have what it takes to do it? Daniel did. He didn't let this decree stop his regular routine. He must have decided that changing his prayer habits would have been denying his God. So he boldly went to the Lord in prayer, even though he knew it could mean the end of his life.

As today is Reformation Sunday, it is good for us to take a minute or two to think about the great Reformer of the Church—Martin Luther. There were many times in Luther's life when he needed great courage to speak his faith. Perhaps the most dramatic took place on April 18th, 1521. The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was presiding over the Diet, or congress, of Worms. It had been a tense four months for the newly-elected emperor. He had been in meeting with princes and rulers. He spent much time attempting to solidify peace in his land and legitimize his rule as the new king. But now all his attention turned towards a renegade monk by the name of Martin Luther. This monk had been causing quite a stir in the land of Germany and Charles V would like to see this problem go away. That is why he invited Luther to come and address the Diet. The day before, Luther had been asked two important questions. First, he was asked if the books which they had laid out before them, were indeed, written by him. The second question he was asked was a more difficult one: would he be willing to recant,

or take back, what he had said about the church in these books? Luther asked for more time to devise his answer to this serious question. The emperor relented and gave him twenty-four hours.

What would you do in that situation? Would you have the courage to stand up for the truth in front of the king, even if you knew that it could mean imprisonment or worse? Would you have what it takes to stand firm or would you recant? We know what Luther did. Luther stood up before the emperor and, in essence, the whole world and said: *“Since your majesty and your lordships want a simple, clear and true answer, I will give it. Unless I am convinced by the teachings of Holy Scripture or by sound reasoning—for I do not believe either the pope or councils alone, since they have often made mistakes and even said the exact opposite about the same point—I am tied by the Scriptures I have quoted and by my conscience. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither safe nor right. Here I stand. God help me! Amen.”* That’s courageous.

Can you think of a time in your life when you have been called upon to make a similar witness to your faith? I don’t think any of us has ever faced the lion’s den in quite the same way as Daniel. Not one of us has been called before the President of the United States and asked to deny our faith. But I think that we can all think of a time or place when we have been called upon to speak God’s truth. Have you ever come face to face with someone that opposes or ridicules the Christian faith? Do you have a friend or fellow employee that thinks some parts of the Bible are foolish? Have you overheard conversations that you know are really offensive to God? These are your opportunities to stand up for God’s Word—even if you feel uncomfortable or afraid to do so. When those opportunities come along you have the courage it takes to say what is right? Or do you give in to the temptation to stay quiet? I know there has been more than one time in my life, where I have lacked the courage to speak the truth and instead acted as though I was ashamed of the gospel.

What will you do when those opportunities come up? How can you be sure that you will have the courage it takes on the day when it is needed? Maybe we have been looking at this question from the wrong perspective. It isn’t about you and me and whether or not we have the courage it takes. We know that left to ourselves we are hopeless sinners. Rather, it is about God. He is the one who can give us the courage it takes. Notice what Daniel was doing when the men came to take him to the king—he was asking for God’s help. How did Luther end his speech at Worms? He said, “God help me.” It wasn’t the individual courage of these men that was on display. It was God’s Spirit working through them that was on display.

And Jesus has promised us this same Spirit when our opportunity comes to speak up for the truth. In our Gospel today, Jesus said to his disciples, *“But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”*

What great words of comfort. If you are wondering whether or not you have what it takes to speak courageously for God, just remember who you are what God has given to you. You are a child of your Father in Heaven. He has given you everything you need. He has given you forgiveness for all your sins. He has given you the hope of eternal life. He has also given you his Holy Spirit. That is all that it takes to witness your faith. And so, yes, you can stand up for God’s Word. You do have what it takes. God has given it to you.

And what will happen when you make a bold stand for your Savior? What happened to Daniel? He was thrown into the lion’s den. But God spared him from the mouths of the lions. What happened to Luther? He was branded an outlaw and a heretic. But God was with him and kept him from his enemies so that he might continue to witness to the gospel. What can we expect? Standing up for the truth is not always easy. It might mean that we will be ridiculed or ostracized. We should expect nothing different. But we can also hold on to God’s promise that he will be with us and will rescue us from every evil attack. We do not need to be afraid. May God give us all a spirit of courage to stand boldly for his Word whenever the opportunity arises! **Amen.**

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