St. Matthew's Lutheran Church & School – Oconomowoc, WI
Reformation Sunday – Year A
Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23
October 25, 2026

Sermon: Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23
Stand Steadfast and Faithful in the Face of Dens and Decrees

He wasn't the first to do it. There were others before him, many of them. Martin Luther, the son of a copper miner, was not the first to stand against the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. There was John Wycliffe, who lived about 200 years before Luther that had the audacity to say the only spiritual authority is the Word of God and not the papacy or a church council. He was declared a heretic. 100 years later Jan Huss preached against the abuse of selling indulgences, the teaching that by purchasing a piece of paper it and "poof" it takes away punishment for sin. He was granted safe passage at a meeting to defend and answer for his stance against the church and then the Roman Catholic Church said, "We changed our mind, to death you go." There were more attempts and challenges to right the wrongs perpetrated by the church, but it didn't amount to anything except for a sermon introduction 500+ years later. Then came a no-name monk named Martin from the backwater town of Wittenberg and we still hear the echoes of the hammer nailing the 95 Thesis to the door of a church to spark debate and instead he ignited the explosion now called the Reformation. Luther was treated the same as those that came before him. He wanted a chance to debate and discuss Scripture based solely on the authority of the Word of God. The Roman Catholic Church granted no such chance. He was told in the most black and white terms possible, recant—take back everything he had written or face the future of those before him who didn't live to tell about it. So was the setting for the Diet of Worms where Luther would stand before the most powerful man on earth, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, for one purpose, to admit his error and take back everything he wrote. If not, face the threat of the same end as Jan Huss. Many of Luther's friends and supporters advised him not to go to Worms. They feared they would never see Luther again because historically that's what happened to people like Luther when called to attend meetings like that.

Luther wasn't the first to be persecuted for his faith and he wasn't the last. Luther wasn't the first to defy the decree of a political ruler with threat of losing his life and he wasn't the last. About 2,000 years before Luther was a man named Daniel that faced the same threat for doing far less. Daniel was an Israelite carried off to Babylon just before the capital city of Jerusalem falls in total defeat. While in Babylon God richly blesses his service to the king and Daniel is ultimately exalted to the third highest ruler of the Babylonian kingdom.[1] He was an Israelite gaining that position of power in Babylon. You can imagine the list of people envious for that power and position rivaled the number of people wanting to get tickets to some local baseball games this week. They scrutinized every decision and action Daniel made eager to uncover a fault and failure so they could discredit him.[2] None were found. Plan B. Daniel's enemies inflate the king's ego and convince the king to decree a law for the next 30 days no one was to pray to any god or person except the king. The decree went one step further. If anyone breaks this law, they are to be thrown into the lions' den.[3] They knew Danile lived his faith. They knew this decree for the entire kingdom was pointed to get rid of one person: Daniel.

What was Daniel going to do? Here is what he did, *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. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help" (Daniel 6:10, 11).* Daniel prayed in his home three times a day before the decree and Daniel prayed three times a day after the decree. The threat of punishment, pain, and death wasn't going to disrupt his worship of the one, true God. He stands steadfast and faithful in the face of the lions' den and a decree from the king. What happens to Daniel is exactly what the king decreed. He is

[1] Daniel 5:29
[2] Daniel 6:1-5
[3] Daniel 6:6-9

taken and thrown into the lions' den. Why was Daniel sentenced to death by the den of lions? Because he publicly posted 95 Thesis challenging the king? Because he tried to build a synagogue in Babylon as a place of worship away from Jerusalem? Because he led an uprising against the Babylonian kingdom? None of those reasons. He was fed to the lions for praying in his home. It was because he made the bold confession of getting down on his knees to give thanks to God. Daniel lived his faith just as he had done before. A decree from a king that set himself up as god wasn't going to change that.

For most of us the crucible of living our faith in this world doesn't come standing before an emperor because of something we wrote or taught like Luther did. It doesn't come from a decree to worship a false god and face death if you don't, although that has certainly been the case throughout history and in parts of the world today. We don't face the dilemma of being thrown into a pit of the kings of the jungle because we refused to listen to a king's God-defiant decree. For most of us it comes with stakes of far less magnitude. Maybe it comes from co-workers that would look at us a little sideways if we lived our faith and it was obvious to them. Maybe persecution comes when the promotion plays hopscotch over us in favor of someone else far more willing to bend the rules and see wrongs as far grayer areas. We are left wondering, "How is that fair?" Maybe it comes as a stumbling block to our personal relationships as Jesus talked about in the Gospel Lesson and remaining faithful in my relationship with my Savior means I lose the relationships of people close to me. Maybe it comes with the perception of losing out in this world when my God is the priority over profits, full purses, and popularity. The thoughts creep in, "Can't I have both?" It doesn't often come in a grand showdown and big moments, but make no mistake about it brothers and sisters, where you stand steadfast and faithful to the Word of God there will be persecution. There will be those moments of following the life-giving Word of God or following the world. Where will we stand? Will we remain steadfast? History is lined with those that compromised and contoured the Word of God to fit in as a chameleon of the circumstances of society to be accepted.

The list of enemies is long. This should not surprise us. Daniel was thrown into the den for breaking the decree. Humans and lions don't mix well. After a sleepless night the king calls out to Daniel and here is the response, *"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." 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" (Daniel 6:22, 23).* Standing steadfast and faithful in the face of dens and decrees is not easy. Great is the temptation to make life easier for us. Great is the temptation to fit in with the world. How do we stand steadfast and faithful? It's easy. "*My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions."* When we look to ourselves it's really difficult. When we look to our gracious God that can shut the mouths of lions, it's easy. God delivers us from the dens and decrees. In the face of teeth meant to tear apart and decrees meant to destroy God delivers his people again and again. In the Gospel Lesson today, Jesus has a huddle with his disciples and tells them, "Out there are wolves. You are sheep. Ready, break!" When you look at yourself as a sheep and the world is full of wolves, it makes no sense. It doesn't look like a strategy, but a recipe for disaster. Yes, when you look at yourself as a sheep among wolves. Who are you forgetting? The Good Shepherd. The Shepherd that laid down his life for the sheep. The Good Shepherd who goes with the sheep. The Good Shepherd who protects the sheep. The Good Shepherd that promises to bring the sheep home.

We stand steadfast and faithful because our Savior is steadfast and faithful to us. How often we have failed and abandon God for what we thought would satisfy and complete us only to find we were fooled by the empty lies of the devil once again. What does God do? Does he push us away for our unfaithfulness? Instead, he gives us a righteousness apart from the law. A righteousness declared and given by God. God in his grace comes to us and says, "You are mine. You belong to me. I declare you righteous because of my Son's sacrifice for you because I am always faithful to my promises." God is always faithful to the unfaithful sinners! That is the miracle of God's undeserved love for you. God has delivered his people from the teeth of Satan that would devour. It's impossible for Satan to devour when his head has been crushed by our Savior and the line Luther wrote in his famous hymn 500 years ago still holds true, "He's judged the deed is done; one little word can fell him."[4] Amen.

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[4] CW 863 v. 3 "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"