Reformation Sunday (10-29-23) SJ, SM

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 The king answered, "The decree stands-- in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."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

In the name of him who is faithful and true, even when we are not, dear fellow redeemed:

What is October 31? If you answer Reformation Day – and not Halloween – there is a good chance you're a Lutheran. In 1517, a Catholic monk nailed 95 theses to the door of the town church in Wittenberg, Germany and changed the world, although he certainly had no idea what would happen.

At first glance, that event doesn't seem to have much in common with Daniel in the lions' den, but a closer look shows two men who even under threats refused to back down from what they knew what right. So today we are reminded to:

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Stand Firm in the Faith
1. Know what is right (Sola Scriptura)
2. Live by trust in God (Sola Fide)
3. Live by grace (Sola Gratia)

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1. Know what is right

Daniel had enemies. With it was prejudice because he was Jewish or people jealous that the king valued his opinion so highly, other high ranking members of the government were determined to make him lose his position. They decided the only way to get to Daniel was in regard to his worship of the God of Israel. So they came up with a plan that for 30 days no one should pray to anyone except King Darius. Anyone who didn't do it would be thrown into a den of hungry lions.

Daniel probably knew it was a trap, yet he continued to pray just as he always had, three times a day. He refused to budge from his prayer life and his worship life, even if it meant losing his life, because he knew from God's Word (Sola Scriptura) what was right, that the Holy Triune God is the only true God and we are to worship no one or to pray to no one except him alone. Daniel stood firm in Scripture.

Martin Luther was similarly pressured. Deny what you have written and we will spare your life. Yet Luther also stood firm: **unless you can show me on the basis of Scripture, I cannot and will not recant.** Luther also stood firm on Scripture.

We also stand firm on Scripture, even when pressured not to do so: such as all holy books are not the same, the Bible alone is the true, inspired and inerrant Word of God; we confess there are not multiple ways to heaven, but Jesus alone is the Way to heaven and there is no way to heaven except through him. We stand firm in confessing that life did not come into existence by random chance over billions of years but by God's will and command in six ordinary 24 hrs day. Like Daniel and Luther, we stand firm on the words of Scripture.

2. Live by trust in God (Sola fide)

Daniel was about 10 was Judah went into captivity, and close to 70 years had passed by this time, meaning Daniel is about 80 years old. This was not a young man who could have had any chance at all of fending off a pack of hungry lions, even for a short time. No, this is an old man who could have been hurt just by being thrown into the lion's den.

Interestingly, King Darius didn't want Daniel thrown into the lion's den, but he was powerless to help Daniel or keep from being thrown into the lion's den. (They had a silly rule that their laws couldn't be changed, even if it was a bad law or a stupid law). The king seemed to be more worried about Daniel than Daniel worried. One commentator observed that Daniel seems to have slept better than the king that night.

Why? Because Daniel lived by faith. He knew he would live if God so decided, and the very worst that could happen is that he would go to be with God in his heaven that day. Luther stood before the emperor, who had the power of life and death, believing that yes, the emperor could put him to death, but yes, if that happened, he would be with his beloved Savior in heaven. Luther too lived by faith – trust in his Savior.

We also live by faith. We got to bed, never knowing if we will wake up the next morning or not. As a recent car-automobile in our area reminds us, death can come suddenly and unexpectedly. Yet that thought doesn't terrify us, because we know that our sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus, and heaven is our future home. We live by faith in our Savior.

Now, we shouldn't have fear and we shouldn't have doubts about this do, but weak, sinful human beings that we are, sometimes we do. Yet even when we are weak, God is still faithful to his promises. **If we are faithless he remains faithful. He cannot deny himself**. (2 Tim 2:13)

The writer to the Hebrews tells us to **hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful**. (Heb 10:23 - ESV) The expression **"hold unswervingly"** in the original language means **"to hold fast"** or **"stick to firmly."** We are to grab hold of Jesus Christ and never let him go. Like Daniel and like Luther, we are to stand firm in our faith.

3. Live by grace (Sola Gratia)
By now, you may have figured out the last portion – sola gratia, we live by God's grace.

Did you noticed Daniel say that he was found innocent in God's sight? Daniel was not sinless. Without doubt there had been times where Daniel was afraid, he wavered, he spoke up when he should have remained quiet and remained quiet when he should have spoken up. Maybe he sometimes in weakness thought God was being too harsh. However, in Daniel 9, he confesses that he shares in the sins of the entire nation: **We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandment and rules. We have not listened to your servants the prophets.** Daniel was not perfect; only Christ Jesus, God's Son was perfect.

So Daniel was not sinless, but he was still innocent, but he was innocent only by faith, his sins forgiven and removed. Another way to say this is that Daniel's forgiveness was by God's grace.

Luther wrote a great deal about God's grace, including the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. The gospel is the means or the way by which God offers and GIVES by his grace his wondrous gifts of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. We remember how Luther wrote in the catechism, **All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it.**

Of course, you and I recognize the truth of those words for us also. God has said us not by anything we have done but purely by his grace and mercy. God saved Daniel and closed the mouth of lions by his grace. He saved the life of Luther from a church and an emperor that wanted to kill him. God saves us too by his grace and mercy.

Today we are reminded on this Reformation weekend to stand firm, but not only to stand firm but how to do it. We stand with by faith, by scripture alone and by God's grace along. We stand firm in the 3 Solas of the Lutheran Reformation. Amen.