

Sunday Sermon November 5, 2017

Sermon Text: Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23

Sermon Theme: What does the Reformation mean for us?

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. <sup>12</sup> 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The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

<sup>16</sup> 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!”

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. <sup>20</sup> 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?”

<sup>21</sup> Daniel answered, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> 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.”

<sup>23</sup> 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.

I have never celebrated 500 years of anything. I have never celebrated anybody’s 500<sup>th</sup> birthday party or a 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary for someone. I don’t expect to have a 500<sup>th</sup> birthday party or a 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary with my wife either. But this year has been all about a 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary: the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. Maybe you have seen it on TV, on Tuesday, maybe you heard it all over the radio. It has been right out front of our church in our WELS Connection video, Luther movie, bulletin inserts, Reformation Service and potluck. Maybe you have asked yourself a question that is on many people’s mind: What does the Reformation have to do with me?

Is the Reformation important because I am a Lutheran? Maybe, but it doesn’t have to be. You could be Lutheran and not have heard anything about the Reformation. Is it important because you are a member of Summerlin Lutheran Church? It could be, but it doesn’t have to be. You can certainly be a member of this church and not know about the Reformation.

Whether we are very tuned into the Reformation, or whether we have missed it, the Reformation should mean something to us because we are Christians. The Reformation focuses our hearts and minds on Christ, bringing that focus back to our loving Savior and how he has opened heaven for us that we might enter through him.

At its core, the Reformation was not about conferences and debates and 95 theses or any of the other things that went on during those years. At its core the Reformation was about Christian men and women who were willing to stand on God’s Word and God’s word alone no matter what anyone else taught or preached.

The Reformation should mean a lot to us because we are reformers too. The Reformation teaches us that, as believers, our hearts and minds need to be reformed every single day in true repentance and faith to walk in God’s ways every day. The Reformation also teaches us to not be afraid to stand as a Christian, as a reformer because God stands with us to protect us and keep us safe.

Let’s go back a few years. Put yourself into that time. There is darkness and unbelief all around you. You have a leader who cares more about himself and people adoring, even worshiping him, than people serving and worshiping in the LORD. His advisors are corrupt. He and his advisors make rules and even pass laws that

benefit themselves and raise themselves over the common people. The truth of God's Word has been hidden by false teachings that are thought of as better than God's own words. We're going back a few years, but probably more than you think. We're going back about 2500 years to the time of the Medes and the Persians.

The Mede and Persian empire had conquered the Babylonians who had conquered the Israelites. The Babylonians had taken many of the Israelite men and conscripted them into service. Some of the Israelite men were turned into slaves, others into soldiers, still others, like Daniel, were trained to be part of the government.

Daniel had risen in the Babylonian government. He was so valuable, that when the Medes and Persians overthrew the Babylonians they kept Daniel as one of the three administrators of the land. These three administrators were only answerable to King Darius. Daniel did so well, that the king planned to make him ruler over the whole kingdom.

As you can guess this did not make any of the Medes and Persians happy that an Israelite was going to rule over them. Their jealousy and frustration turned into further sin as they plotted to get rid of Daniel. They thought they could trap Daniel by using his own religion against him.

The satraps and other administrator came up with a plan. They went to the king and they used the king's ego to set a trap for Daniel. They said, "King Darius you are a great king, the best king. You should be praised as the greatest king ever. Issue a decree that for the next thirty days no one can pray and worship anyone but you, Oh King. If they pray to someone else, throw them in the lion's den. And king.... Make sure that it is a decree that cannot be repealed. This will show how wonderful and serious you are about people praising you."

Daniel was faced with the same question that every Christian must answer. When I and my faith are challenged and attacked, do I give in to the temptation, or do I stand firm on the Word of God as Christians and reformers do?

You can imagine what went through Daniel's mind when he heard about the edict. There must have been at least a few moments when Daniel contemplated what to do. There must have been at least a thought or two about what might happen to him if he went against this decree. He was probably tempted to not worship for a month, or at least hide it.

We may not be forced to worship a false god like Daniel did, but there are times when we are faced with real-life situations where we are put into a position where we are tempted to compromise our faith or doctrine in some way and the easiest thing is to do it.

It is very tempting to look how we might benefit if we give in just a little. For Daniel, it might have been acceptance by the satraps and administrators. Maybe if he would have stopped worshipping just a little, they would have accepted him as an equal. Maybe if he had worshipped in private, he would have had freedom from the worry and stress of getting caught. Maybe if he just took the month off, he would not have to fear death by lion attack.

Luther would have had much the same benefits of giving in to temptation of compromise as Daniel did. If he would have given into the temptation of compromising his beliefs, how nice it would have been for him to be accepted by the church and not have people trying to kill him. If he would have just toned it down a little, he wouldn't have been in so much trouble because his message would have never gotten into the wrong hands. If he would have not gone to some of the conferences or had not been so bold in them he would not have had to hide for two years.

For us it is very tempting to think that we should not take a stand on the Word of God because we would benefit in those ways too. If we do not push our faith forward we would have more friends, less stress, less embarrassment and less conflicts. We know how easy it would be. We even joke that we don't talk about religion or politics if we want to remain friends with someone.

Our hearts need to be reformed every single day. Our hearts need to be changed from hearts that are afraid to stand on the Word of God, to hearts that stand only on that Word. When Daniel was faced with temptation, he did not trust in himself, he trusted in God to save him. For Daniel, his God had given him the promise of a Messiah, a Savior from sin. For Luther and for us, we see our Savior who has given us everything by giving up everything himself. Our Savior lived perfectly for us, took our place and received our punishment. Jesus even died for us that we might live. Jesus has reformed our hearts from hearts of sin to hearts of faith.

Now that our hearts have been reformed by Jesus, our only response is to thank and praise him with our lives. And that's what we do. We are reformers ourselves, standing firm in faith. As we stand as reformers in this world, we do not need to be afraid. God is with us to keep us safe.

Daniel did not give in to the temptation to compromise his faith. He did not even take a day or two to think about it. He went home and continued to pray as he had before. Daniel did not hide, but was so visible that his actions were immediately known.

Those who hated Daniel immediately reported to the king what they had seen. Now the evil plot to kill Daniel becomes clear for all to see. The king cannot save Daniel even though he wants to. He can do nothing to change his decree or the punishment, he must order Daniel to die in the lion's den.

But what happens to this reformer? God was with him and protected him against danger. When the king runs to the lion's den in the morning Daniel is there with good news, **“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.”**

How could Daniel stand firm even though it meant almost certain death? How could Luther stand before the emperor of the known world and tell him no, which also meant almost certain death? How can we stand firm on God's Word, even though it will mean problem, struggles, conflicts, harsh words and actions against us?

The answer to all is the same. We do not need to be afraid. Daniel did not stand alone as he stood on God's Word as a reformer in his day. Luther did not stand alone as he stood on God's Word as a reformer in his day. Neither do we stand alone when we are asked to stand on God's Word as a reformer in our family or amongst our friends and neighbors. Our God stands with us to protect us and strengthen us even when we stand against many other voices or many other beliefs. Jesus says, **“Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”**

As Christians, the Reformation should mean a lot to us. The Bible is full of reformers. Any Christian is a reformer. We are reformers too. We stand in a long line of Christian men and women, which include Daniel and Luther, the apostles and disciples, the men and women of the reformation and even the martyrs of faith who have stood on God's Word to call out to people with the Gospel that the Holy Spirit might reform their hearts in true faith. May we continue to stand firm and proclaim his Word faithfully as his reformers.

In the same way that Daniel must have been tempted, we too are tempted when our faith is challenged. Do we give in, do we make concessions, do we cut corners? As believers our hearts need to be reformed every day from the sin that lives in them to hearts that stand firmly on the Word of God.

Instead of giving in temptation, Daniel's heart was reformed by the Word of God. He knows that he cannot give in to this temptation or he would be turning away from his God. He trusted in the love of his Lord to save him and protect him from this attack.

Just like Daniel, our hearts and minds need to be reformed.