

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Our Advent Prayer”
Daniel 6:3-18
November 27, 2016

Like most kids, the story of Daniel in the lions’ den is one of Brandt and Theo’s favorites. When I tell them I’m going to read a bible story, they almost always ask for either David and Goliath or this one.

In part I think that’s because Veggie Tales does such a great job with this story. I mean, I love singing some of the songs from that one... like when the King’s other advisors start to get jealous of Daniel and anxious that this foreigner is the King’s favorite... and they start singing,

“Oh no, what we gonna’ do?
The King likes Daniel more than me and you.
Oh no what we gonna’ do?
We gotta’ get him outa’ here.”

But I think for them it has more to do with lions. They love to make lion sounds.
[roar!]

Before you know it both of them start roaring as we’re trying to get ready for bed.... and I end up being the one praying God’s angels will come and keep these lion’s mouths closed and keep them in bed, so I can get some sleep.

Of course, I doubt Daniel got any sleep that night. We know the King didn’t. He’s up all night worried about his trusted advisor that he just threw to the lions. In the morning, he’s so relieved to find Daniel still alive, that he let Daniel out.

You probably remember all that from your children’s bible. It’s funny though, how those bibles always leave out the best part. The king then commands that all those other advisors, the ones that schemed up this plan, be thrown into the lions’ den... And not just them. Oh no. But their wives and their children, too.

And apparently, those lions were ready for breakfast by then, because the scripture says, “before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones into pieces.” Roar!

I love our children’s bibles, but there’s always a lot more to the story than what we learn as kids. And that’s the problem for us who have grown up with these stories. They have a lot of bite to them, but we haven’t learned how to hear them well as adults.

For starters, you need to know that the stories in Daniel are stories from the exile... long after Israel has been wiped off the map. Which means, these are stories about what it looks like to have faith... in a world that doesn't share your faith, to follow God, in a world that doesn't recognize your God.

They are stories about what it's like to live from a different set of beliefs,
a different set of values,
from the culture you live in,
and from your neighbors, and your co-workers,
and even from your friends.

The stories from exile are stories about a counter-cultural faith
and a counter-cultural spirituality.

This is where the story of the Old Testament takes us to as it comes to the end. The people of God, the children of Abraham, the followers of Moses, the descendants of David... have been carried off into exile... and later scattered across the known world.

And all of them are left wondering what in the world it means anymore to be God's people in a world that doesn't care about their faith, and in a violent world that doesn't make much sense.

Of course, we're here in these stories because this is where the narrative of the Bible takes us... It's where the story goes just before we transition to the New Testament with the birth of Jesus.

But we're also here because, as I said last week, this is what Advent is all about. These are exactly the kinds of questions we're invited to ask this time of year.

What does it mean to be God's people in this time and this place?

How in the world are we to be faithful to our ancient faith
in this modern world that cares more about the economy than our neighbor?
in this culture that cares more about the size of the Christmas tree than the size of our hearts?
in this market-place that wants to sell us an easy answer to our deepest longings... for a special holiday price?

...and even among friends that have bought into the idea that more is better... more lights and food and entertainment... never mind that you're left over each year with that credit card debt, with a hangover, a few extra pounds around the middle, and a nagging emptiness.

Of course, all our holiday celebration is pretty well intentioned. I don't mean to be a scrooge here.

We do need to celebrate, and I hope you celebrate well.

I hope you'll laugh with your family,

and are generous to your friends,
and toast to life and joy.
I hope you'll splurge a little and celebrate fully.

But in order to do that, in order to celebrate well, then we're going to have to be aware enough to not buy into the empty promises and the subtle lies that get mixed in with all our celebrations...

the promises and lies that teach our kids more "stuff" will make them happy, and the lies that convince you that your family is supposed to be picturesque around the holiday table...and if they aren't, then you can't know joy.

And the lies that keep our calendars so overpacked this time of year that we're simply worn out and exhausted before we even get to Christmas Day.

The stories from the exile are exactly what we need in Advent, because they remind us that there is a way to be faithful, and to be whole, and to find life, even when we are surrounded by competing values, and assumptions, and practices that lead to emptiness and death.

And certainly Daniel does that for us in the most simple and yet profound way. You see, Daniel's great act of resistance in his world is prayer.

***His great act of resistance in this story,
is simply to pray.***

Of course, he knew the law, the expectation: For 30 days everyone was to pray only to the king. And it would be awfully easy for him to just give in, or to lay low for those 30 days. I mean, in the scheme of things, would the next month really matter?

Well, apparently Daniel would say, **"yes, it does."**

Daniel would tell us our hearts are so easily led astray... that the one act of resistance we must hold onto.... is prayer.

You see, Daniel knows this isn't just about the King. ***Prayer is an act of resistance to all those forces other than God that would seek to claim your allegiances; that would seek to claim your heart.***

It's an act of resistance of anything that wants to shape your life other than God. Because praying is a way that we set and we recognize the fundamental orientation of our lives.

For the next 30 days, there is an awful lot that will be clamoring for our attention, and our desire, and our hope, and our fulfillment. There's an awful lot that will be clamoring for your heart.

And so, I want to invite us to enter this Advent with a prayer of resistance. For the next month, I want to challenge you to pray one simple line that Jesus called us to pray, a line from the Lord's Prayer: **"Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

In fact, let's try that now. Let's pray:

"Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

It's very simple, and I promise you can fit it into your schedule. Call me crazy, but I imagine you could find time to pray that several times a day..

If you have a hard time setting aside a lot of time in your day, pray it when your alarm goes off, before you get out of bed... as you rub the sleep out of your eyes, sitting there on the edge of your bed, let's pray: **"Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

And again when you lie down at night, before you turn off the lights, let's pray: **"Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

When your calendar is getting full and you feel the stress of this season building in you, let's pray: **"Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

For your family, for your friends. for Dayspring, let's pray: **"Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

Keep praying, and you will be surprised how it shapes you this Advent. **Keep praying**, and your celebration will be deeper... and the Light that is coming into the world, will shine brighter.

Each Sunday, we'll pray the whole prayer as we gather for the table.

"Our Father, who art in heaven...."