

Trust Issues?

Daniel 6:10-16

Odds are you haven't heard too many sermons on Daniel. If the book of Daniel were a movie, it would be a combination between the high flying adventures of Indiana Jones and the surreal world of Alice in Wonderland, where one isn't so sure what is real and what isn't. It's not always easy to make heads or tails of some of the stories.

Daniel has been used by some Christians as a proof text for future events that will lead to Jesus' return. It misses the mark of the original intent of Daniel. Rather than being a book of literal predictions for a time even beyond our own, the stories of present events are placed in the past – as if to say history has a way of repeating itself.

The dominant theme for the Book of Daniel is one of encouragement to believers in God. These have been tough times for the Israelites during times of exile, oppression and occupation. After years in exile, the people returned home, but continually found themselves under the rule of outsiders. The stories in Daniel came together to witness to the power and persistent presence of God throughout these difficult times.

In our story this morning we find out that Daniel is one of those worshiper of God. He also serves a king who is considered a god in his own right. Daniel's a hard worker and good at what he does. So good, in fact, that the king wants to make him the administrator over the whole

empire. Daniel's co-workers are not big fans of this idea. So they conspire against him. They appeal to the king's ego-centric personality. They propose a law that would require the whole empire to pray only to the king for 30 days. It sounds like a law only a narcissist could love. They knew Daniel wouldn't obey this law. He was too committed to his God to give up prayer and worship for a whole month!

The punishment for violating the law was steep...violators became dinner for a pack of lions. When King Darius realized that his ego trip would cost him his trusted advisor's life, he wanted to take it all back. All he could offer Daniel, as he headed off to the lion's den, was a faint hope that the God Daniel was so faithful to would somehow save him. You know it's a bad day when the king who has sentenced you to death wants to take it back and can't. It seems like evil will prevail.

The whole situation seems like a parody, like an episode from Saturday Night Live. A king, who is revered as a god creates a law that he himself cannot reverse? Really? What kind of power does this guy really have anyway? Who would want to revere him? Let alone worship him? It's a divine dram-meddy. The drama is the tension we feel as Daniel is sent off to the lion's den. Will God save him, as the king expresses hope for? Or will this story end in tragedy? The comedy comes in the foolishness of the king. How is he expected to run an empire when the only thing he seems to see is himself?

Today, most of us can't claim that we face oppression or hardship at the hands of rulers like the Israelites did. And sometimes it even seems that those in power are comedic figures. But there are many in our society that feel the effects of policy making much more profoundly than most of us do. Just ask families who work multiple jobs and still can't make ends meet, ask the immigrant family who has come here looking for a life of hope like all of our families did at one point in history, or talk to the child whose family has never known anything but poverty. It's easy to make them a target and put all the blame on them for their problems.

Do we ever stop to ask, "What happened in their lives that got them there in the first place?" Perhaps they were operating out of the only set of values they ever knew, like Daniel. Or they have experienced injustice from the law and have learned not to trust it. Or perhaps those in power near-sightedly created policy designed to serve their own self interest, rather than that of the common good. I'm not pointing fingers at one party or another. What I am saying is that there is something intrinsic in our human nature to operate the way we do. We don't always understand or trust one another, nor do we take the time to learn. People make mistakes, they act in self-interest. And often that harms others.

Perhaps the hope for all of us and all people lies with King Darius' final words to Daniel, "May your God...rescue you". And may we have confidence and trust to act in faith, knowing that our God will rescue us as well. Amen.