7-13/14-19 The Power of Trust Rev. Amy Haines

Daniel 6:10-13, 16, 19-23

Imagine being a traveler in the early days of the Wild West, and approaching the mighty Mississippi River for the first time, at a place where there was no bridge.

One traveler found himself there, unsure how to cross. Fortunately, it was winter, and the great river was sheeted over with ice. Yet the traveler was afraid to trust the ice, not knowing how thick it was.

Finally, with infinite caution, he crept on his hands and knees and managed to get halfway over.

And then he heard a sound from behind him—singing. He also heard the sound of horses’ hooves. Cautiously he turned, and there, out of the dusk, came another traveler over the ice,

driving a four-horse load of coal, singing as he went!

 -adapted from sermonillustrations.com:faith

Which type of traveler are you, as you navigate life’s journey? Which type of traveler are you,

as you seek to follow where God leads you? Are you hesitant, fearful, uncertain? Or are you trusting, hopeful, confident?

My hunch is most of us are somewhere in between these two characters. Or more often we find ourselves hesitant in one moment, and confident in the next.

Throughout this summer, we have reflected in worship on stories of our ancestors who stepped out in faith, trusting the power of the Holy Spirit, to live into who God called them to be.

Esther and Naaman. The Good Samaritan and the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They lived by boldness and obedience, by hope and kindness, by faith and faithfulness.

This morning we encounter the story of Daniel, whose life was grounded in the power of trust.

Trust is our reliance or firm belief in the character, truth, ability or strength of someone or something. Daniel’s story is a story of full confidence and reliance on our God.

Interestingly, his story is not often part of the lectionary, the three-year cycle of Biblical stories that often guide my preaching. Daniel’s story is more often told to children than preached to all ages on a Sunday morning. Today’s passage from Daniel 6 will be the first story our VBS children we be taught this week.

So, since Daniel’s story is not often told, even though he has an entire Book of the Bible named after him, who was he?

Daniel’s story begins in the Babylonian exile. He was one of many forcibly exiled to Babylon

when Jerusalem was destroyed. Like many of the other brightest and best young men of Israel,

even though they were exiles in a foreign land, Daniel was placed in a civil service training program and taught the literature and language of the Babylonians. He was given a new name, new food and expected to believe in a pagan, multi-god religion. Once trained, Daniel was then placed into service in the king’s court.

Unlike many young men trained alongside Daniel, he chose not to abandon the faith of his ancestors. Daniel trusted in the God of Israel, even if many believed that God had abandoned them when the exile began.

Daniel’s strong faith guided his entire life. In Daniel chapter 3 is the story of Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego, Daniel’s friends who ended up in a fiery furnace because they refused to worship a foreign idol. Yet God protected them and not a hair on their heads was singed. Imagine how such conviction molded Daniel as a young man!

Now, decades later, Daniel is again challenged to trust the Lord God Almighty. By now, Daniel is in his later years, anywhere in his 70s, 80s or 90s. Daniel has continued to serve whatever king was in charge, even as the empire shifted from Babylon to Persia.

Now King Darius is on the throne, and Daniel is so well respected with such a winsome spirit

that he was appointed one of three presidents over 120 satraps, administrators who all had the purpose of ensuring the king suffered no loss in the accounting of taxes paid to the empire.

Daniel so impressed the king that soon he would be put in charge of the entire kingdom.

Daniel was following in the footsteps of his ancestor Joseph, who became second in command to Pharaoh in Egypt. Yet both men remained faithful to God even as they served in a foreign land.

King Darius was very impressed by Daniel, even if he was a servant. The other men doing the accounting? Not so much. They didn’t appreciate this foreigner being given such authority in the empire.

How often today do we still see this jealousy rear its ugly head, when “outsiders” are still not trusted simply because of their background, even if they had proved themselves faithful time and time again.

The other administrators tried to find some legal challenge to rid themselves of Daniel’s leadership—yet they could find nothing wrong in Daniel’s present or his past. His life from free from scandal! No Sexual Immorality--No Embezzlement--No Betrayal--No Palace Intrigue--No corruption--No negligence--Nothing!!! Daniel had all his “I” s dotted and all his “T” s crossed. He was honest, blameless and did no wrong.

These jealous leaders could only find one weakness in all of Daniel’s life—his unyielding devotion to the God of Israel. In that area is where they set a trap.

Like Esther before him, Daniel got caught up in an edict not of his doing. The other administrators convinced King Darius to issue an irrevocable edict that for 30 days no one would be allowed to pray to anyone, human or divine, except the king. If they were caught, they would be thrown into a den of lions. The kind agreed and the edict was ordered.

Daniel, because of his rank, knew of the edict in a very short time, and I also imagine knew it was aimed at him.

So what did Daniel do? How did he respond? Daniel continued to pray, morning, noon and night, with his face pointing toward Jerusalem. Daniel refused to hide his prayers, but continued them on his rooftop, just like any other day. He did not pray as an act of defiance to the king. Rather, he continued to cultivate the relationship he had spent his life building.

Daniel cultivated his relationship with God so that when the ultimate test of his life came,

his faith in God was there! The more Daniel knew God, the more Daniel trusted God. And Daniel trusted God to be with him in that moment, in the face of that edict, no matter what would happen next.

Daniel knew he was risking his life, but did not change his patterns of prayer for even thirty days. He did not hide his faith; he did not shut down his faith. He continued to pray three times a day-with the window wide open. Daniel knew he was being watched-but he did not change his ways.

Daniel lived into what God declared to the people in Deuteronomy:

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” -Deuteronomy 31:6

How many of us would stop praying for thirty days if we knew our lives were at stake- or we would pray, but in secret, changing our ways to get around the rules and the culture?

How many of us might compromise instead of trust? How many of us might change our ways if we knew we were being watched?

The reality is, we are always being watched. Others look at we claim the name of Christ

to see how we reflect our Sunday faith in the midst of everyday life. Do we truly love God and love our neighbor? Do we work against the injustices of this world? Do we cultivate a relationship with God through prayer, worship, study and service? Do we trust God when life is out of control?

Daniel knew he was being watched, but never changed his course of action. He’s older, wiser, and even more confident in God’s presence. If God could keep Daniel’s friends safe in a fiery furnace, God could keep him safe in the depth of a lion’s den. And if death was to be his fate,

Daniel still trusted God to be present with him even in death.

So Daniel continued to pray--and was arrested. The King was distraught, yet knew his order was irrevocable. So Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den, a stone was rolled across the mouth of the den, and the King and his leaders set their seal on the door, so that no one would tamper with it.

We really don’t know what happened in the lion’s den that night. This is where our imaginations take over. The Scriptures say that God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. I imagine once that happened, Daniel trusted God enough that he laid down and slept.

Daniel’s faith also influenced King Darius. Before being thrown into the lion’s den, the king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you faithfully serve, rescue you!” (v16) This is a king who believed in many gods. This is a king who had just ordered an edict that everyone worship him and him alone. Yet this king had also seen the strength of Daniel’s faith lived out day after day. So amazingly, the king said to Daniel, “Your God will see you through this.”

And while Daniel slept in the lion’s den, trusting in God’s care, King Darius spent a restless night, fasting, praying to his own gods to rescue Daniel. The king was the first one to the pit the next morning, crying out anxiously to Daniel, hoping for a response.

Once again, in the king’s cry, he honored Daniel’s God, asking “Has your God been able to save you?” And imagine the shock on everyone’s face when Daniel responded, “Yes my God is able.

He shut the mouths of the lions. He judged me innocent and so I live.”

“The king was thrilled. He commanded that Daniel be brought up out of the pit, and Daniel was lifted out. Not a scratch was found on him, because he trusted in his God.” (v23)

Daniel lived by the power of trust. He faithfully relied on God’s presence, God’s promises,

and God’s providence.

I don’t know what all lion’s dens you may be facing right now. What challenges and struggles you face every day. What battles you are winning or losing.

Maybe you aren’t facing the lion’s den, yet you are facing the constant changes of life—

deployments and moves, illness and death, loneliness, insecurity, job transitions, financial challenges, fear and doubt.

In the midst of our lion’s dens, in the midst of our challenges of this life, it is easy for us to either want to control everything or give up.

Yet remember what we learn from Daniel today.

Today we learn from Daniel that no matter what we face, God is with us. As Psalm 23 reminds us, God is with us in the dark valleys as well as beside the still waters of life. The highs and lows and in-betweens.

Learn from Daniel that we can trust God’s presence with us and care for us. As Romans 8 reminds us, if God is for us, who can be against us? Nothing can separate us from God’s great love.

Learn from Daniel how to cultivate a relationship with God that guides us through all of life’s adventures, joys and sorrows. Daniel cultivated the habit of prayer that sustained his faith in a foreign land. What spiritual disciplines keep us connected with Christ, through the ordinary and unexpected days of our lives?

Learn from Daniel to trust in God. God sees the big picture of our lives even as we only see the day to day.

Yes, evil is still present in our world, unexpected tragedies still happen, and not all our prayers will be answered in the ways we expect, yet God is still God. We can still trust God’s promises.

That we are loved and forgiven and freed to live a new life through faith in Christ. We can still trust God’s presence with us in the celebrations and sorrows of our lives. We can still trust that by the power of God within us, guiding us to live by faith and hope, God will do far more through us and within us than we can ask or imagine!

James Brown once shared how he learned to fully trust in God. He said,

..Some years ago when I was learning to fly, my instructor told me to put the plane into a steep and extended dive. I was totally unprepared for what was about to happen. After a brief time the engine stalled, and the plane began to plunge out-of-control. It soon became evident that the instructor was not going to help me at all. After a few seconds, which seemed like eternity,

my mind began to function again. I quickly corrected the situation.

Immediately I turned to the instructor and began to vent my fearful frustrations on him.

He very calmly said to me, "There is no position you can get this airplane into that I cannot get you out of. If you want to learn to fly, go up there and do it again."

At that moment God seemed to be saying to me, "Remember this. As you serve Me, there is no situation you can get yourself into that I cannot get you out of. If you trust me, you will be all right."  That lesson has been proven true in my ministry many times over the years.

-James Brown, Evangeline Baptist Church, Wildsville, LA, in *Discoveries*, Fall, 1991, Vol. 2, No. 4. , on sermonillustration.com:trust

God is with us. May we learn to live by the power of trust, the power of faith, the power of hope, even when the lions roar.

Let us pray.