

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY MARCH 22, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Facing our Challenges, Conquering our Fears”

Based on Daniel 1:1-15

It is hard enough to get out of the boat when the wind is calm and the water's smooth. But in life that is rarely the case. Sooner or later the storm strikes – in your marriage, work, ministry, finances, or health. It is in the act of facing the storm that you discover that lies inside you and decide what lies before you...Storms have a way of teaching what nothing else can.

~John Ortberg

In the days of ancient Israel, invasion was an everyday word. The Old Testament is full of stories of conquering kings and heroic slaves. It was common practice for the winning side to gather the spoils of war before returning home: food and cattle, prized possessions of gold and silver, men and women who would be suitable workers in the mines and grand construction projects of the ancients; learned men, scribes, artisans, and members of the royal family, who might be of use to the king. Daniel was one of those.

If you were lucky, your exile as a slave would only be a matter of a few years, when at such time, another army would defeat the victor of the

last invasion, and with some good fortune, you would be returned home as part of the spoils. But sometimes, exile went on for generations, as it did with Moses, and his cry to “Let the people go!” While in exile, life expectancy was low and options were few.

And so it was that Daniel, and his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abendego found themselves summoned to the palace of the great King Nebuchadnezzar, to be trained in all things royal (Babylonian style), and in time, to be given a place serving the king.

What luck! While others were delegated to spend long days in the sun making clay and straw bricks by hand, Daniel found himself directed to a bed, comfortable clothes, and a hot meal at the end of each day. Daniel was wise to realize that while lady luck had dealt him a good hand, he was still a slave, and the king's favour could turn at any moment. He worked at building a good rapport with the palace overseer. Life would be a little easier if he could keep him onside. As their conversations grew over time, Daniel realized that while the chief officer was not

a slave, he was as trapped as Daniel himself:

“I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink... The king would then have my head because of you.” (v10)

You see the problem was about food (and you thought it was going to be about lions). Yes, the problem was about food. Yet, it really wasn't about food, it was about faith. Compared to the thin broth those in the desert making bricks were likely to eat, the choice food from the king's table must have seemed like a dream to Daniel and his companions. Who wouldn't rush eat and eat and thank their lucky stars that they had landed here? The only problem was, the food was not kosher. The food had not been prepared according to the laws of the Torah. And to an ardent member of the Jewish faith, this was not a matter of eating defiled food. This was a matter of defiling YHWH, of desecrating His law, and dishonouring the Almighty.

It became a defining moment for Daniel. And like I said earlier, we hadn't even got to the lions yet. Eat the food and stay safe. Don't eat the food,

and face a precarious future. If he was lucky, a short stint at the copper mine before a certain death, or a quick death here and now on the palace floor.

Daniel chose to stand steady.

Daniel held true to YHWH.

Daniel swallowed his fear.

Daniel stood ready to face what would come next.

Stand Tall in the Face of Fear

Some would have simply called Daniel a fool, to pass up 'the good life' in the palace, and make a fuss over food. "YHWH would understand, wouldn't He? For heaven's sake, the Chosen People were in exile. You couldn't expect them to be perfect in these circumstances, could you?"

Yet, for Daniel, it wasn't really about food as much as it was a reflection of his faith. And when push came to shove, and he had to make a choice: faith came first. Even if that meant being sent to a salt mine. Even if that meant leaving his friends. Even if that meant death. He would not dishonor his God. Should we all be courageous enough to "Dare to be Daniel!"

Help Can Come From Unexpected Places

Daniel is not the only hero in this story. The palace official in charge of the royal slaves trusted Daniel enough to give him a chance to show, that eating different food would not make them sick. Yet, this

was a gamble on his part, punishable with his death if Daniel was wrong.

I don't think the palace official would have taken the chance, had Daniel not worked hard at building a relationship with him, with chit-chat and sharing stories and conversation over time. Dare I suggest that Daniel had made friends with him?

In these days of great uncertainty, we live in fear.

- We are fearful of what the news will bring each morning.
- We are fearful that this virus situation will get worse before it gets better.
- We are fearful that someone we know will become ill.
- We are fearful that we might lose someone we love.
- We are fearful that the world we have, will not be the world we had, when this is over.

But we must not let this fear consume us and begin to define who we are as people, and as people of faith.

- We must stay safe, and be sensible, of course.
- We must follow the directions of our Government and our Health Minister's and our own good common sense to stay healthy, but we must not let this fear paralyze our thinking or our actions or our belief in humanity.
- We must continue to stand tall and live out the

principals of Godly love, just with a hand sanitizer in our back pocket!

- We must continue to visit, just over the phone instead of in person.
- We must be patient with one another, which let's face it, can be hard on a good day sometimes, let alone in difficult times!
- We must continue to smile, and sing, and pray.
- Yes, we must continue to pray.

But let us not forget that a helping hand may come from some rather unexpected places, Christian or otherwise. Or perhaps, you may be the helping hand in these difficult times, which pushes us to stand before lions, and be gracious and generous to difficult people. Daniel saved himself and his friends because he continued to build relationships with the people around him, not just his friends. Don't forget about the people around you.

It is likely that things will continue to be uncertain for some time yet. The boat is facing a storm and is beginning to rock. Remember.

We have an anchor that keeps the soul, steadfast and sure while the billows roll, fastened to the Rock which cannot move, Grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love

~ Priscilla J. Owens