

Call to Worship

As we begin our worship these words are for our thinking this morning: “Speak, Lord for we are here. Young or old, or in between, you call us: Speak, Lord, for we are here. Working, retired, at school or at home, you call us: Speak, Lord, for we are here. Joyful, or sorrowing, rested or restless, you call us: Speak, Lord for we are here.

On this new day, gathered as God’s people: come, let us listen, for God is still speaking; come, let us worship God!”

Hymn CH4 162 The God of Abraham praise,

Prayer of Adoration & Praise

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Eternal Mystery, Wholeness and Goodness, Light and Life, beyond our understanding, offering us the breath of life that we might breathe life into a world in need of peace.

Gracious God, we come into your presence in this Holy place where we have met you before and have given attention to your mandate of love that flows through our communal life. We come, knowing that as much as we have learned, there are still mysteries that we do not understand, there are still paths that you have made where we have been afraid to journey.

Forgive us Father, for we often cling to our own earthly rules and our positions of safety and power, instead of listening to what you have to say to us and holding onto your hand held out firmly that we might journey with you into the world and into the future that you have prepared.

God open our eyes, Christ open our hearts, Spirit open our way. Help us to see more clearly, to love more deeply, to journey more courageously, carrying the truth and grace of the one we proclaim, so that this world might be transfigured by your glory. That your light would be hope for humanity held in darkness. That

all would come to the mountain of God and rest there, knowing the peace that Christ promises.

For all this we pray through our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us when we come together to pray: Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

All Age Talk

Hymn CH4 531 My Jesus, my Saviour

Reading: Daniel 6: 1 – 23

Daniel in the Pit of Lions

¹Darius decided to appoint 120 governors to hold office throughout his empire. ²In addition, he chose Daniel and two others to supervise the governors and to look after the king's interests. ³Daniel soon showed that he could do better work than the other supervisors or the governors. Because he was so outstanding, the king considered putting him in charge of the whole empire. ⁴Then the other supervisors and the governors tried to find something wrong with the way Daniel administered the empire, but they couldn't, because Daniel was reliable and did not do anything wrong or dishonest. ⁵They said to one another, "We are not going to find anything of which to accuse Daniel unless it is something in connection with his religion."

⁶So they went to see the king and said, "King Darius, may Your Majesty live for ever! ⁷All of us who administer your empire — the supervisors, the governors, the lieutenant-governors, and the other officials — have agreed that Your Majesty should issue an order and enforce it strictly. Give orders that for thirty days no one be permitted to request anything from any god or from any human being except from Your Majesty. Anyone who violates this order is to be thrown into a pit filled with lions. ⁸So let Your Majesty issue this order and sign it, and it will be in force, a law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be changed." ⁹And so King Darius signed the order. ¹⁰When Daniel learnt that the order had been signed, he went home. In an upstairs room of his house there

were windows that faced towards Jerusalem. There, just as he had always done, he knelt down at the open windows and prayed to God three times a day.

¹¹When Daniel's enemies observed him praying to God, ¹²all of them went together to the king to accuse Daniel. They said, "Your Majesty, you signed an order that for the next thirty days anyone who requested anything from any god or from any human being except you, would be thrown into a pit filled with lions."

The king replied, "Yes, a strict order, a law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be changed."

¹³Then they said to the king, "Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, does not respect Your Majesty or obey the order you issued. He prays regularly three times a day."

¹⁴When the king heard this, he was upset and did his best to find some way to rescue Daniel. He kept trying until sunset. ¹⁵Then Daniel's enemies came back to the king and said to him, "Your Majesty knows that according to the laws of the Medes and Persians no order which the king issues can be changed."

¹⁶So the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and he was thrown into the pit filled with lions. He said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve so loyally, rescue you." ¹⁷A stone was put over the mouth of the pit, and the king placed his own royal seal and the seal of his noblemen on the stone, so that no one could rescue Daniel. ¹⁸Then the king returned to the palace and spent a sleepless night, without food or any form of entertainment.

¹⁹At dawn the king got up and hurried to the pit. ²⁰When he got there, he called out anxiously, "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was the God you serve so loyally able to save you from the lions?"

²¹Daniel answered, "May Your Majesty live for ever! ²²God sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions so that they would not hurt me. He did this because he knew that I was innocent and because I have not wronged you, Your Majesty."

²³The king was overjoyed and gave orders for Daniel to be pulled up out of the pit. So they pulled him up and saw that he had not been hurt at all, for he trusted God.

Hymn CH4 55 **Safe in the shadow of the Lord**

Sermon – “The Courage and Faith of a Lion”

Lions. These days they are mainly found in Africa, but in Daniel’s time they were found all over Southern Europe and the Middle East. They were hunted relentlessly and kept as zoo and performing animals. Why? Well apart from being large dangerous carnivores, they have always been a symbol of strength.

Down through the ages, from early hunters, through all the major empires up to the twentieth century, lions were a symbol of strength and power. We see the lion appearing like this within the texts of the Old Testament – Samson wrestled a lion. As we come through the picture of the Lion of Judah in Amos, we see Jesus given the title “The Lion of Judah”. Why? Well, because in the lion we see strength and control.

However, it is not that aspect of the lion I want to focus on today, because the lion is also a carnivore which devours. The lion is a vicious hunter that shows no mercy. That picture is also Scriptural – we see the devil pictured in 1st Peter, chapter 5, as a vicious hunter, lurking around, seeking those he can devour.

It is that sort of lion which Daniel faced. The story tells us how it happened – it is a familiar tale. Yet, what started all this jealousy off, that resulted in Darius being duped into having to throw Daniel into the den of lions?

I read a story once of a man who went to join the circus. He was trained for a trapeze act. Before his first performance he was told to put on a gorilla suit as he was being advertised as “Gerry, the Flying Gorilla”. The circus owner told him

that you just cannot get real gorillas anyway and training them to do a trapeze act was difficult and expensive – the public would not be able to tell the difference.

One evening whilst on the trapeze in his gorilla suit, the man made a mistake and fell into the lion's cage. He was petrified and start shouting; "Help! Help! Get me out of here!" One of the lions turn to him and said, "Shut up you fool, or we will both lose our jobs!"

It was prayer that led Daniel into the Lion's den. One of the things I want to encourage all of us to focus on, over the summer months, is prayer. Personal prayer, corporate prayer. Why? Well, prayer makes a difference. Prayer makes a Daniel. For Daniel was a man of prayer – it was obvious. He prayed regularly – three times a day. Everybody knew about that. He prayed because it made a difference.

Which leads me to wonder – do we have a reputation of being people of prayer? How often do we pray? When we feel like it? Only in Church? Once a day? Twice a day? Only in emergencies? Daniel had cultivated a prayer life. A.W. Tozer wrote this: *"God can be known satisfactorily only as we devote time to Him."*

So, today let's take some time to look at the difference spending time with God made to Daniel.

Firstly – Prayer leads to blessing. If you have read the Book of Daniel, one thing that is obvious is that Daniel succeeded in a place where he was initially a captive

but rose to be a senior figure in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian government, then in the Persian government, and finally, in the government of Darius the Mede, where we find Danile in a position of power directly under the king. How?

Well, in the whole of Daniel, it is attributed to his unwavering faith in God. Daniel was a man of prayer and out of his faith and prayer life we see a man of integrity in all that he did. The other supervisors and governors tried to find something wrong in the way Daniel administered the empire, but they could not, because Daniel was reliable and did not do anything wrong or dishonest.

Do we want to see God's blessing in our lives? Do we want to see His Kingdom prosper and grow – then we need to be people of prayer as well as being people of integrity. Not just a bit here and there – but regular, sustained prayer. Prayer individually, prayer as a Church family.

Secondly – Prayer leads to confidence. Daniel was blessed, but that did not mean that he was free of all of life's problems. The jealousy and self-seeking of others took him through the ordeal we read. Yet, Daniel knew his God. When he about the decree that Darius was conned into, what did he do? When Daniel learned that order had been signed, he went home. In an upstairs room of his house, there were windows that faced toward Jerusalem. There, just as Daniel had always done, he knelt at the open window and prayed to God three times a day. Was he deterred from praying even though he was now doing something illegal? Nothing stopped Daniel from doing the right thing which was to keep on praying.

I wonder – what do we do when we face discouragement as Christians? Do we stop coming to Church? Do we stop praying? Do we doubt God? Many Christians do, and where does that get us? It may make us feel better in the short term, but what of our relationship with God? Whether it is in good times, or particularly when we hit difficult times; we need to be in the presence of God, sharing our worries with Him.

We are not told anything about Daniel’s conduct as he was thrown into the lion’s den. We know what Darius thought – he was upset that his own authority had been used to “con” him into this position. Obviously, the idea of people only bringing their requests to him, was in his mind, probably, quite a good idea. It asserted his authority – but God had other plans for him.

Now, we can choose to be a “Daniel” or a “Darius”. Daniel prayed and followed God’s will. Darius put himself first and it resulted in Daniel, whom he valued, having his life threatened. If we do not pray, then we are Darius – going by what appeals and what seems right – and it will come back and haunt us. Are we Daniel? Or are we Darius?

Finally, Prayer leads to deliverance. Prayer makes a difference when God acts. When difficult times come, let us make sure our confidence remains in God as we pray. I expect Daniel must have wondered what was happening to him. Yet, God shuts the lion’s mouths. Daniel passed through the night unscathed. As a result of Daniel’s faithfulness, Darius, the conned king, believed in Daniel’s God.

Sometimes, we do not pray, because, for some reason, we do not feel strongly enough that it will make a difference. Yet it does. This man of prayer, Daniel,

saw even more blessing for being faithful. Are we ready to make the transition from just “saying” to actually “doing”? We can give it our mental assent – but in the end, we need to spend more time with God in our own devotional lives, and as a Church family.

So, the story of Daniel and the Lion’s Den, must indeed be one of the best known of the Old Testament. It is a classic example of good conquering evil, a victory against all odds. Yet, it needed the faith and the bravery of Daniel for that triumph to happen, his willingness to make a stand for what he believed in, regardless of the consequences.

Today, thankfully, times are very different, there is little chance of us being fed to the lions – not literally anyway! Yet, we need people of Daniel’s stature as much as ever. People ready to risk all in the cause of truth, ready to hold firm their principles despite every attempt to sway them. Like Daniel, we need the courage and faith of a lion.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn CH4 562 Through the love of God, our Saviour,

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Lord God, you have given us everything we have and are. You gave us what we have given and what we have kept. Use all that we bring this day to bring others to Jesus, and what we have kept for your glory.

Father of all, awaken us to joy in the mystery of Your presence at the heart of all things. For day by day, You hold us in love.

Saviour of all, call us to holiness, to all that is beautiful and good and true. For day by day, You walk with us along life's road.

Spirit of all, let us feel Your breeze upon our face. For day by day, You are within us and around. Prompting, comforting, challenging, inspiring, leading us in the ways of God.

Ever present God, in whom we are richly blessed, teach us to use Your gifts with gladness and care. Bless us with kind hearts and caring eyes to notice the lost and the least and lead us to live bravely in the way of Christ and His cross.

God of surprising grace, in our weakness You are our strength, in our darkness You are our light, in our sorrows You are our comfort and peace and from everlasting to everlasting You are our God.

As we bless You for the life of this congregation, our life together in the church, we pray for the health and well-being of the church worldwide and all the variety of its worship and witness. Let Your church give heart and voice to Your continuing concern for people who are afraid and in need.

We pray for the hotspots of our world Father, where anger burns, fear reigns and many innocent people are caught in the crossfire.

Inspire compassion and generosity in all our hearts. Bless those who work to provide rescue and shelter and those who seek just ways of bringing the exodus in human misery to an end.

We pray for our own nation, that in all the opportunities and challenges of these days we will be free from the inequalities and divisions that threaten to impoverish our common life.

As in Christ's presence people found healing and calm, we pray for those left feeling betrayed or left behind, whose hearts are filled with anger. People who face days of illness and treatment, or whose earthly life draws to its close, all who long for comfort and peace in the storms of their life.

Father, you know everything about us, our loved ones, our friends, our neighbours and our colleagues. As we pray together, we take time to name and pray for someone we love, someone we know who is experiencing great pain today – grieving for a loved one, fearful of the future, not sure what life holds for them. We also pray for someone experiencing great joy today – the birth of a baby, a birthday, a new job, a wedding. As we name that someone, we pray they will feel the presence, the healing, the love and the grace of the Living God with them...

For the new way of life, You have set before us in Christ. For Your truth to inspire us and Your love to sustain us. For the dawning of Your kingdom and all who work towards its fulfillment, we bless You and give You our thanks.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning is now and shall be for evermore. Amen

Hymn CH4 182 Now thank we all our God,

Benediction

Nurtured, loved, and challenged: go in the beauty of God the Maker, go in the love of Jesus the Healer, go in the challenge of the Holy Spirit. Go to love and serve. So, may the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.

Recessional Song – 'May God's blessing surround you each day'