Daniel 6:23c So Daniel was brought up from the pit, and he was unharmed because he trusted in his God.

I have to tell you I was kind of shocked as I was getting ready to write this sermon. The truth of the matter is that usually when it come to any text, I have preached on them numerous times. Yet, as I read this text, it dawned on me that I had not preached on this text or at least couldn’t remember preaching on this text. So I went to my sermon file and low and behold, I preached this text only once before. It doesn’t surprise me that I didn’t remember preaching on it because the last time I used this text in a sermon was in 1987! Well, it is high time we heard from this portion of God’s history again. And in truth, I think this text is exactly what you and I need to hear at a time like this.

I say that because of the turmoil of the times. We have a Presidential election going on and although all of them in my lifetime have been political forays into madness, this one seems to be a bit worse than normal. Seriously, if you knew nothing of either man and had to base your vote on just the political ads and “news” articles out there, you would probably just shake your head and wonder why either candidate was on the ballot, the ads are just so negative and often distorted on both sides. If anything it shows you what a mess the world can make of itself.

Then there is the pandemic. There is no doubt it is a serious thing and by that I mean the disease itself. Covid-19 is clearly a serious disease to avoid. And yet, when you look at the statistics it is clear that the recovery rate is somewhere in the 99% range. Actually the worse part of this pandemic is the fact that you can’t seem to get reliable and absolutely trustworthy information. One group says this and another says that. Wear masks, don’t wear masks, social distance or don’t. For every aspect of this pandemic there are often two very opposite sides of the issue even among the medical professionals, so how is a regular person like me supposed to figure out what is going on? That’s the worst part, not being able to trust what is being said and done.

Well, welcome to the world and how it often operates. The world is filled with intrigues, plots and political drama of all kinds and always has been. The text before us is a reminder of the way things have always been but it is also a reminder to not let the garbage of the world interfere with your trust and confidence in God. Our theme will be: **DANIEL, EXAMPLE OF FAITH.**

Let’s just remind ourselves of who Daniel is. The history of Daniel begins when he is but a young man, most think he was 16 or 17 when literally his world fell apart. Daniel was one of a large group of young men who were deported to Babylon, the capital of the country that was at this point ravaging and destroying his country. Think about that. Young Daniel hauled off to another country by his enemies: family, country and way of life gone! Yet it is clear that Daniel is not going to lose or desert his faith.

That is already made clear in the early history of Daniel. Daniel is in Babylon with his fellow exiles where he is to learn and study in the great arts and sciences of Babylon. As a part of their life, the king had assigned an allotment of food for these young men, food from the King’s table. But Daniel, because of Jewish dietary laws, refused to eat this food and asked for different food for himself and friends with him. What is amazing is that Daniel’s request is granted, and after a trial period, this request was made permanent. Just think of that, young man Daniel standing up for his Jewish faith and ways, really, Daniel sticking with his God. Remember, Daniel has been carried away to captivity. From all viewpoints Daniel’s God should have been judged inefficient, and worthless…but not to Daniel. Daniel knew that all that was going on was actually in the hands of and by the very will of God. Happening because many of the Jewish people for centuries had abandoned God and his ways. God’s prophets had made clear this was going to be because of faithlessness and it is clear Daniel simply believed what God’s Word said.

Here are a few other highlights of Daniel’s life. Daniel is already a captive for 8 years before the next wave of Jewish captives are dragged into Babylon. By then Daniel has proven himself a leader and was in a position to help his fellow Jews. Daniel will be a captive for 19 years when the Babylonians totally destroy Jerusalem and its Temple and again deport most of the country. In truth, Daniel will serve the Babylonians for years as a high ranking official and royal adviser and yes, Daniel uses his position to help his people during this time, all the while maintaining his trust and faith in God.

Now comes the history before us. About three years before this incident, the Babylonian Empire had been overthrown by the Persian Empire. A whole new ruler and government is in place and yet Daniel is considered so trustworthy and important that he is again put in a position of high rank in the new government. We are told the country was organized into 120 different satraps with three supervisors over the satraps. Daniel was one of the three. And then we are told, that Daniel so distinguished himself that King Darius was going to put Daniel in charge of everything. The kicker was that the other satraps and supervisors hated and despised Daniel, because of his faith and thus a great problem arose.

These men began to look for a way to get rid of Daniel (and by the way, Daniel is probably in his eighties at this point, but evidently is still as sharp and wise as any younger man.) They looked but Daniel was so upright that there was nothing, absolutely nothing to accuse him of. Daniel had conducted his life as if he was always answerable to God. Did you catch that? Daniel conducted his life as if God were right at his side watching, which is true. Daniel served and lived like God was right with him. Daniel understood and accepted the judgments of God, including his exile and that of his countrymen. Daniel stood firm in his faith as his fellow workers, men he had known and worked with for years, turned on him and wanted his death.

So the conspirators came up with a plan to defeat Daniel on the basis of his faith and religion. We know that trick don’t we, can’t find dirt then attack their religion and faith. They knew Daniel’s habits, after all they had just conducted an intense investigation to find something on him. They knew of Daniel’s deep and regular prayer life. It was in this that they found their scheme to get Daniel killed. They had King Darius issue a decree that anyone who prayed to any god other than to King Darius for the next month was to be thrown into the lions’ den. I have no idea how it is that Darius doesn’t grasp that in signing this decree Daniel’s life will be forfeit, but I will chalk it up to the fact that he has only been King for the past three years and doesn’t know Daniel’s religion and life or that fact that Daniel won’t compromise.

And that’s how we get to the horror of the lions’ den. The King, distraught that his top official is trapped like this has no choice but to follow up on what he has decreed. So with great anguish he has Daniel thrown into the lions’ den and he does so with these words: **“May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you.”** That was all the King could hope as he sealed up the den with Daniel inside.

I want to tell you that I think Daniel was terrified. It not that the lions’ den hasn’t been used before. The lions are kept very hungry and just waiting for whatever comes their way. It seems it is sure death for Daniel. But think of this. He knew this decree was made. He knew his enemies were out to get him. He knew all of this and yet Daniel went to his room and continued with his regular and purposeful prayer life. Just because things looked bad doesn’t mean Daniel thought God was bad. Daniel understood that God’s ways were not his ways and that God’s wisdom was not his wisdom. Daniel had in his life seen how God had used him to help the exiled Jews and I have no doubt that Daniel had confidence that God would do exactly what was right and needed to serve the divine purpose and will. I have no doubt that Daniel thought, “If the lions’ kill and devour me, thanks be to God and if the lions’ do nothing, then thanks be to God.” Daniel, no matter the strife, no matter the difficulty, and no matter the fear does not waver in his confidence that God would do what is best! What a great example of faith!

We, of course, are privileged to know the outcome of this difficult night. We are told the King did not sleep well at all. For that matter we are told the King was so distraught at what had to be that on that night no type of entertainment at all was brought his way. The word used there seems to indicate that the King did not eat, sleep, drink or do anything but fuss about Daniel. And when early morning came the King rushed to the lions’ den, rushed to see if Daniel’s God had delivered him. We are told he cried out, **“Daniel, servant of the living God, your God whom you serve continually: Was he able to rescue you from the lions’ den?”**

I want you to note Daniel’s response. He calls back, **“Your Majesty, may you live forever! My God has sent his angel and shut the mouth of the lions, and they have not hurt me because he found me innocent before him. Also before you, Your Majesty, I have committed no crime.”** Those words are remarkable. Notice that Daniel is still respectful and treats his King with absolute honor even though the King put him in there and even though God had just given Daniel a great victory. No gloating, no in your face attitude, just humble Daniel grateful to be alive.

And note that Daniel spoke of an angel that delivered him. I am going to tell you that I laugh at anyone who would suggest that this is just a figure of speech and a part of Daniel’s imagination. It is not. An angel came and did what Daniel said. For that matter, I believe Daniel is told by the angel that this deliverance was because of Daniel’s innocence. Innocent before God because of his faith in God’s grace and innocent before the King. And I have no doubt that Daniel had been instructed in exactly what to say. You see, God’s Word tells all of us: **“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent out to serve for the benefit of those who are going to inherit salvation?”** (Heb 1:14). I believe those words. I believe all whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life on a regular basis have protecting angels guarding them. We just don’t see it and honestly, we don’t even fully comprehend how many times they guard and protect us. This is the promise of God and in Daniel’s case, Daniel was privileged to see and speak with that angel for the benefit of his faith.

With that Daniel is pulled from the lions’ den and there isn’t even a scratch on him. Just so you know, we are then told that the King, outraged at the dirty trick played on him and Daniel, had all the conspirators thrown into the lions’ den. Let’s just say that the lions were not hungry for a while.

Because of all of this Darius issued a decree that all should fear and honor the God of Daniel. Daniel prospers and is wonderfully able to be a help and service to his people. And without a doubt it is clear that because of Daniel, Darius, also known as Cyrus will issue a decree allowing Jews to return to their homeland and to rebuild their Temple to the glory of God.

Daniel is a great reminder to stay true and faithful to God. I don’t know if God will rescue you and me from the mouth of the lion but I do believe absolutely that God is working and accomplishing his will in our world in accord with His plans for his faithful children. It doesn’t matter what is going on, pandemic, divisions, discord, persecutions, etc. keep your focus and hope in the Lord. The Lord will bring about exactly what is to be.

That isn’t true only in Daniel’s life but in all of history. Think of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the like. Think of Mary and Joseph, and especially of Jesus. It didn’t look good for Jesus as he was dying on the cross and suffering horribly but in the end, look at how that horror served for the eternal good of God’s children. Or look at the life of Luther, yep, it is Reformation Sunday. Luther stood his ground on God’s Word despite the fact that just about the entire papal Empire was willing to kill him. And here we stand today, still marveling in the grace of God because the wonder of Jesus and salvation was restored by that simple German monk.

And truthfully, look at your life. God has acted and moved in your life always for your good. If you are like me, you marvel that you are still around, so many times God has worked in your life that you might serve his purpose, that you might stay firm in the faith until He does call you to his heavenly home.

Whatever your circumstance and life, turn and put your trust and confidence in God and Jesus. It is such a wonder how God so loved us that He gave us this Savior for our eternal salvation. God will forgive and deliver. God does love you and wants you to grasp that simple and wonderful fact. In the hands of God, no matter what happens in this world, his purpose and his salvation is delivered. And we are blessed by this wonderful hope and love. Keep the faith. Trust in God. Be delivered in Jesus. Serve the Lord with gladness. Amen.