Newlonsburg Presbyterian Church
WORSHIP·SERVE·GROW

Standing when Everyone else Bows

Daniel 3:1-18 10/11/26

I have the honor of speaking at two significant events in the next few weeks. The first is a fundraiser in which you are all invited for the George Family on Saturday, October 17th from 1P-5P at the Moose in Export, PA. The family of 5 went from enjoying a weekend at a dance competition to all being hospitalized because of someone's mistake, sin. Why God allows us to participate in sin, we may never know. But what I have witnessed in offering pastoral care is a family responding in the faith of Jesus Christ and hope for the future. As William has said many times, "In Christ we can do all things." - Philippians 4:13 Lynn's faith in Jesus Christ has provided the tools of perseverance, courage and hope for the future. Courage is not rooted in the certainty of rescue; courage is rooted in the goodness of God.

The second event is speaking at our Stephen Ministers training in November. If you don't know the Stephen Ministers, they are a group of trained church members to be available for you in a time of loss in your life. They are trained listening confidants. The question I have been tasked to answer for my training event is "How do I handle grief?" Grief is our natural emotional response to significant loss. I am going to frame the discussion around the hope we have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Loss is not permanent for we have hope for the future. Our greatest witness maybe refusing to allow fear to determine our faithfulness. And that is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Let's continue to hear that following Jesus is practicing trusting instead of reacting to fear in Daniel 3:19-30.

If you think this passage is long and ridiculous, you are right! God's Word mocks those who have their loyalties misaligned. **The question of the week, "Where does your greatest loyalty rest?"** One of my favorite activities as a pastor is premarital counseling and pointing out the fact that if we were able to see your calendar and your bank account, we would know exactly who you are and what you value. God knows our calendars and bank accounts. The Lord is the one who knows best where our greatest loyalty rests. The Lord knows how we spend our time and money!

Nebuchadnezzar wants to know where loyalty rests. Have you ever known of a leader to drone on and on about how great they are. Nebuchadnezzar was one of those kinds of leaders that God's Word mocks, that's why this passage drones on to exaggerate and to get the hearer to feel the preposterous nature of the leader creating a spectacle to celebrate himself. Could you imagine if one of our leaders created a public spectacle to celebrate his own birthday? Or had a golden statue of himself? This is the kind of leader God's Word mocks in the book of Daniel.

Typically, we are not demanded by our leaders for loyalty, but it is other cultural interests that demand our time and attention. As our family has navigated raising children and the different loyalties vying for our attention, Hope has had a wise response, "What is the return on investment?" With all the time and money spent on you name the youth activity, "What is the return on investment?"

With Nebuchadnezzar demanding loyalty, what is the return on investment? I am sure for business owners of Babylon the return on investment with loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar was access to the king to influence laws and taxes in their favor. The return on investment was also keeping their life.

But what was the return on investment for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for refusing loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar and going to church to worship the Living God? **What is your return on investment by coming to worship and building Christ's Church as opposed to all the other activities?**

Because Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego worshiped each week, let's think of their return on investment for going to church. Their faith wasn't miraculous, they were training their whole lives for this event. When everyone else was bowing in fear, they stood up in faith because they practiced worship. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were their names given to them by the Babylonians to forcefully assimilate to Babylonian culture, but the Book of Daniel makes it a point to tell us that they never lost their Hebrew names of Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah. Worship gives us identity. Identity that no one can take away!

Worshiping weekly provided them with identity. Studies show that a strong sense of identity decreases anxiety and provides confidence.[1] Strong identity is one of the keys to mental health and living well. Worshiping weekly provided them courage to stand up for and strengthen their community while everyone else was bowing to cultural pressures. Worshiping weekly provided them hope and perseverance in the face of adversity. The return on investment in practicing the faith of Jesus Christ is life even though we may die! The return on investment on weekly worship is to refuse to let fear dominate our thinking and ultimately to live well!

Who was that fourth person in the furnace? I believe that person is Jesus. Jesus is in the furnace with us. We don't have to face hardship alone. The outcome of worship is community with Christ and Christ's Church. When tragedy strikes you are not alone. When significant loss occurs, you have the Stephen Ministers.

Our greatest witness maybe refusing to let fear determine our faithfulness. But faith is fragile if not practiced.

For the glory of God and the betterment of humanity,
Pastor Curtis

Theme: Following Jesus is practicing trusting instead of reacting with fear.

Sermon Notes:

1. Courage is not rooted in certainty of rescue; courage is rooted in God's goodness.
2. Followers of Jesus can disagree politically while remaining united in worship because both confess "Jesus is Lord" and agree Jesus deserves ultimate allegiance.
3. What competes with Christ for my loyalty?
4. Our greatest witness maybe refusing to let fear determine our faithfulness.

[1] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8319849/