

July 5 Worship Transcript

Welcome and Prayer - Elizabeth Alderfer

Good morning, and welcome to worship at Tabor. After meeting together last week in the parking lot for our service, we are back to a digital worship playlist. It was nice to have a change and get to see part of the congregation even if it was only through vehicles and windows and we will hopefully be able to do that again. Today, we continue studying how God appears in unexpected places in our lives. We have all probably had an experience where we were able to see God help us in a hard time or when we weren't expecting it. Daniel, too, saw God in the lion's den where he was supposed to be punished and killed. However, Daniel was faithful and unwavering in his commitment to the Lord and in return was saved from the lions. May we also have faith like Daniel so that we can be saved from whatever struggles or hardships we encounter in our own life. Please join me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, thank you for caring about us. Thank you for loving us so much that you would save us from anything that tries to harm us. We give thanks because you rescued Daniel from the lion's den and gave us that example so that we can see how leading a life focused on You can give us the greatest rewards. Thank you for your unconditional love and understanding that is so much more than what we know. Amen.

Children's Story - Janna Duerksen

Good morning Tabor children! It is so great to be able to share a story with you this morning even though we are not together.

I am wondering how many of you have seen a lion at the zoo? Now, it is one thing to SEE a lion, but how many of you have HEARD a lion? One time when we were at the zoo we were taking pictures of the lions because they were sitting on top of this rock so majestic, when all of a sudden, the male lion began to make sounds (show pictures and a short video). This was unexpected but so amazing!! (Invite children to practice their lion roar!)

In today's story, which is a familiar one, Daniel continues to practice his faith even though it wasn't safe and he surprises many people. (Invite children to roar every time they hear the word lion in the story!!- if you hear them all, you should be able to roar 6 times!) Let's see what happens: Read "No Lunch for Lions"

Daniel was another prophet of God. He lived in a city called Babylon. Daniel was honest and smart and good, and the king of Babylon liked him. But some mean people were jealous of Daniel because the king liked Daniel more than he liked them. They wanted to hurt Daniel, so they tricked the king into making a very silly law. The law said that people could pray only to the king—and no one else. If people disobeyed, they would be thrown into the lion's den—a big cave in the ground that had several hungry lions in it. When Daniel learned about the new law, he wasn't afraid. He knew what the right thing was, so he still prayed to God. The mean people saw Daniel praying and told the king right away. "Oh King! Your friend Daniel disobeyed your law! He prayed to God. He

must die!” The king was sad. He didn’t want to let the lions eat Daniel, but the king had to follow the law. So, Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den. The king went home. But he was too worried about Daniel to eat dinner or fall asleep. In the morning, the king ran to the lion’s den and yelled, “Daniel! Are you alive? Did your God save you?” Daniel yelled back, “I’m fine! God sent an angel to keep the lions from eating me!” The king was very happy that Daniel was safe. And he was so amazed that God had saved Daniel that he made a new law—the king told everyone they should follow God!

Wow! Can you imagine what it would be like to have lions—huge, hungry lions—standing all around you? That must have been super scary for Daniel! But what if an angel suddenly appeared in front of you? Now you wouldn’t be scared! You would know that God was with you. Daniel knew that it was better to do what God wanted, not what other people wanted. Daniel also knew that God would take care of him when he obeyed his commands. God can help you do what He wants to do too. God loves you, He is with you, and you can trust Him.

Let’s pray: Lord, thank You for always being with me. Help me to do what You want—no matter what other people say, help me to follow You. Amen
OK, you all have a great day and I hope to see you soon!

Scripture Reading: Daniel 6:1-23 (NIV) - Carrie Smith

1 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

6 So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! 7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. 8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.

10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12 So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

13 Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” 14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

15 Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”

16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”

17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. 18 Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. 20 When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

21 Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! 22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”

23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

The Word of God for the People of God. ***Thanks Be to God!***

Sermon “Living Allegiance” - Pastor Phil Schmidt

Last week, we considered the connection between the time of Israel wandering in the wilderness and our own wandering through the pandemic wilderness today. This week, we are shifting our focus to the time when God’s people were in exile, forced to live in a foreign land, with different culture, language, food, and so on. Similarly, I think many of us can resonate with this image of exile as we consider this time of global pandemic. The pandemic invaded our lives without warning, and we are now living in what seems like a foreign time, with different language, like “social distancing” and different cultural practices, like wearing masks. As we explore our Biblical story, I invite you to consider this metaphor of exile and what we might learn from this story to help us navigate the challenging days of pandemic exile ahead.

The story of the book of Daniel is set right after the Babylonian empire attacked and destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC and took many of the Israelites into exile. Among those taken were four men of the royal family of David, including Daniel along with three of his friends we know by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The story throughout the book is about how Daniel and his friends sought to maintain hope amidst the trauma of exile.

Today, we are focusing specifically on the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den, but before we get to that story, let's first recognize that it is part of a pattern of stories that all have a similar theme. In chapter 1, Daniel and his friends are recruited to serve in the royal palace of Babylon, but they are pressured to give up their Jewish identity by living and eating like the Babylonians. Amidst this pressure, they choose faithfulness to God. In chapter 3, Daniel's 3 friends refused to worship a huge statue, choosing faithfulness to God even at the risk of being thrown into the fiery furnace. Then in chapter 6, Daniel faces similar pressure to worship the empire at the expense of his faith in God.¹

Many of us know this story well. "Daniel in the Lion's Den" is in most children's Bibles and is a favorite of my boys. So instead of re-telling the whole story, which we just heard in the children's story and scripture reading, I'd like to highlight a few things that stand out.

Daniel was in a position of authority in the empire, yet as in politics today and throughout history, his position of authority threatened other leaders, who thus conspired against him. And here's one verse that really stands out to me. Verse 4 says, "At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent." As John Goldingay says in his commentary, "It's quite a compliment to Daniel that they couldn't find anything, except that he thought God was too important."² Now that's a way to live: trustworthy, without corruption, declaring with word and deed that the living God is top priority.

The other leaders knew that if they were to remove Daniel from power, it would have to have something to do with his observance of Jewish law. Thus, their conspiracy was hatched and they convinced King Darius to make a decree that anyone who worshipped a god or human other than King Darius would face death in the den of lions.

And here's the next verse that really stands out to me, verse 10: "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." Just as he had done before. Daniel lived a life of faithfulness to God, even while in exile, praying and giving thanks three times a day, which is even more than required by the Torah. When Daniel learned about the new decree, he knew the risk and consequences of continuing to practice his faith. And yet, he kept praying three times a day, just as he had done before.

¹ for a more full context of Daniel, see <https://bibleproject.com/explore/daniel/>.

² Goldingay, John. Daniel and the Twelve Prophets for Everyone (p. 36). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

You see, the temptation for Daniel would have been for him to hide his faith for the 30 days of the decree, perhaps to pray in secret or even to stop praying for a time. But as we mentioned earlier, Daniel lived in a way that revealed God to be top priority in his life. Day in and day out, Daniel declared his allegiance to God through the way he practiced his faith, including the way that he prayed. If he changed his prayer practices in response to the decree, it very well could have communicated a message that his allegiance had shifted away from God and to the worldly King. So Daniel continued to pray to God, just as he had done before. And just like his 3 friends from the story in chapter 3, he faced a severe consequence: almost certain death.

Daniel would face the den of lions even though King Darius tried to find a loophole to rescue him. The King could not rescue Daniel, but the living God could. And God did indeed rescue Daniel from the lions, sending an angel to shut their mouths. Daniel continued trusting God even in the most challenging times. It's an amazing story designed to give hope to God's people facing the trials of exile. Don't give up. Don't stop practicing your faith. The God of Exodus, the God of Promise, can rescue you from your den of lions.

With that being said, I also acknowledge a key difficulty of this passage. God doesn't always rescue or heal all people who trust God. Putting our trust in God isn't about getting a free ticket out of pain and suffering. In fact, putting our trust in God and God's kingdom can often lead to greater challenges and tensions.

Putting our full trust in God is about allowing God to transform us from the inside out, so that we do not conform to the world, to the empires of the world, but rather allow the living God to shine in and through us.

So as we journey through our current reality of pandemic exile, may we recommit ourselves to trusting God, to practicing our faith, to living in a way that reveals God as our top priority.

Some specific encouragements related to topics of debate in our current climate:

First, as we have been highlighting over recent weeks, many people have become much more aware of systemic racial injustice in our country both now and throughout the past. As a rural congregation of mostly white people, we could keep our faith hidden and not engage in these topics of conversation. And yet, like Daniel, amidst the rising tension all around, I believe this is a time for us to continue practicing our faith, specifically to continue living out our peace witness, as Emil encouraged us in his faith sharing a couple weeks ago. How do we go about doing this? It's about caring, listening, learning, and acting. Perhaps you want to join the book study of Drew Hart's *Trouble I've Seen* book. Perhaps you want to do other reading/learning about these topics. Perhaps you are ready to do a prayer walk to the church peace sign, as encouraged by the Deacons. Perhaps you want to join a Black Lives Matter rally. Whatever it is, I encourage you to take a step of faith toward practicing more justice and peace. Like Daniel, may we not hide our faith in a God of justice and peace, but rather allow God's justice to shine more clearly in and through us.

Second, another hot topic these days is masks, or face coverings, which are being mandated by more and more government officials, including by Kansas Governor Kelly. In response to these mask mandates, many people are resisting, declaring that it impinges on their individual rights. And yet, as we consider the story of Daniel, we can recognize that these mask mandates are very different from the decree to worship the King of the empire. Wearing masks is not about declaring allegiance to a specific political party. Rather, masks have shown effectiveness in preventing the spread of COVID-19, and thus they are a cheap and easy way to fight the virus. So, let's not wear masks just because the Government officials are telling us to. Let us choose to wear masks in public as a way of actively practicing our faith. Amidst this global pandemic, masks are a sign of love and care for our neighbors, declaring that we are willing to lay down our individual rights in order to protect their health and well-being. A quote I saw recently by Steven Charleston sums it up well: "To mask or not to mask? It is such a simple question with such a clear answer. If I knew I could save even a single life, I would gladly wear a mask every day. What else would love have me do?"³

Third, this weekend, our country celebrated Independence Day, which is a reminder of the American origin story, how our country was birthed through a time of chaos and conflict. And throughout our country's existence, the American empire has called for our ultimate allegiance and devotion. The empire calls for us to pledge our allegiance to a flag, to sing the national anthem, to support a specific political party and agenda. And yet, as people of God, our primary allegiance must not be to a worldly empire. Like a Daniel, we are constantly tempted to hide our faith, to compromise our allegiance to God and God's kingdom. And like Daniel, we must choose to keep practicing our faith, to keep declaring our allegiance to God and God's ways above all else. Let us find many creative ways to reveal that God is the top priority in our lives! This may very well lead us into times of conflict and risk, yet we know that our living God is with us to strengthen us no matter what.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, amidst our time of pandemic exile, may we actively live our allegiance to God and God's kingdom. May we live our faith by learning more about systemic racial injustice and moving toward more just practices. May we live our faith by wearing masks in public as a symbol of love and care for all people. May we live our faith by declaring our allegiance to God's empire over the empires of this world. May we live our faith by being peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in a world full of division. May we live in such a way that the only thing people can charge us with is that we think God is too important! May it be so. Amen.

Faith Sharing "Trust and Obey" - Michelle Unruh

As a musician, I often find myself turning to music when I struggle to articulate my thoughts and feelings. This time it's #544 in the blue hymnal, When we walk with the Lord. Trust and obey, for there's no other way To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. The past four months have been a journey. A journey that is long, and we can't see the end yet. The days are long, our lives are filled with so many unknowns, and we can't seem to even plan what will happen tomorrow. But these days have also been filled with opportunities: educational opportunities, professional opportunities, opportunities for personal and faith growth... So many people have gone out of their way to creatively gather people together.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/clergycoachingnetwork/photos/a.553233241362454/3402672526418497/>

This journey is overwhelming. There were times when I felt myself struggling to make it through each day with endless to-do lists and way too much time on my hands. Motivation to complete tasks was difficult knowing that the to-do list would still be there tomorrow with even more alone time. The days were exhausting. And yet, this journey provided me with new opportunities to connect with people. I talked with some out-of-state friends more often than I had before. I was able to go on walks with friends. We would walk and talk on the phone, even though 1400 miles separated us. I even got to have a Zoom lunch with a friend on a Tuesday, something I couldn't have done if I was teaching. Connecting with friends in new ways provided me with an opportunity to recharge my heart, mind, and soul.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. This hymn presents the text in such a straightforward way. There are no other options. Trust. Obey. It's pretty simple. And yet, challenging.

When bad things happen to us, we can wonder, where is God in all of this? Why did this happen? The coronavirus is a bad thing, but we must look for the positive things that God can bring from this. The pandemic has taught me that I am not in control. I like planning and scheduling, but recently, I have had to release this control and lean on God.

I don't know what the future holds. I don't even know what tomorrow will look like. What will my job look like next year? As a music teacher, there are so many unknowns and so much research yet to be done to determine if it is safe to gather together and make music. With lots of alone time, it can become so easy to worry about the unknown. My mind races with "What ifs?" What if we have to wear masks at school? What if we have to do school virtually? What if I need to teach music on a cart? What if we can't sing or play instruments? What if music gets cut? What if? It's a downward spiral. And then God whispers to me, Trust and obey. God has gifted me with time. Time to read and learn new things. Time to relax. Time to settle into a new home. Time to build on existing relationships. Time to spend outside in nature.

This journey provided me with the opportunity to think and reflect. The past four months have been a journey, an eye-opening journey. A journey of growth, a journey of loss, a journey of change, a journey filled with opportunities, a journey of walking with the Lord. And just like Daniel, I'm learning to put my faith in God. Never fear, only trust and obey.

Prayer and Blessing: Pastor Rosie Jantz

Today as we come together in prayer, we are grateful for the healing that has come to Esley Schmidt, and that he was able to return home last Monday evening. So for this we say, thanks be to God!

We also pray for Hildred who learned that she will need cataract surgery in the coming weeks. So we pray for her sight to be fully restored. Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us join our hearts and minds together in prayer.⁴

God of grace and God of glory, pour on us the power of your love.

As we honor you with our worship today, honor our hunger for your story to be re-revealed through us, your church, today.

As we hear and remember your story of faithfulness throughout all generations, we are reminded and humbled by your mercy toward us. Thank you, God, that we can entrust the deepest longings of our heart into your care and for your keeping.

Hear us, O God, and answer us.

We give you thanks for Esley's return home. Continue to be his strength and guide as he recovers. We pray for Hildred as she prepares for cataract surgery. Increase her faith and calm her fears.

O God, we pray for all who are dealing with illness, grief, pain depression and loss. We remember those who are not able to join us through technology. Be especially with those in retirement home who can't have visitors. Give us insight into their needs, and may your peace and presence surround each one, and be recognized in unimagined and unexpected ways.

Hear us, O God, and answer us.

Grant us courage and wisdom to face each hour, each day, each week of what seems to be an unending journey through this Covid-19 pandemic. It seems each day we hear of new outbreaks of the coronavirus, and of the virus of violence and oppression. O God, just as you calmed and strengthened Daniel in the midst of terror and trauma, silence the lions of despair, anger, and hopelessness that close in and around us. Still the roar of lion, and deliver us from the fears that long have bound us. Free us to hearts of compassion, grace, faith and praise.

Hear us, O God, and answer us.

Cure our warring madness, and bend our sin of pride and certitude to your ways of justice and peace. Release us from our selfish desires and strengthen our allegiance to your kingdom's goal.

Grant us wisdom; grant us courage for the living of these days. Give us vision beyond our present tense, and rescue us - serving you whom we adore.
For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever, Amen.

Blessing (adapted from Daniel 6:26b-27)

As you go from this place,
may God deliver and rescue you;
working signs and wonders in heaven and on earth
filling you with wisdom and courage to serve the living God
whose kingdom will never end. Amen.

⁴ Based loosely on hymn no. 366 HWB. "God of grace and God of glory."