

Sermon #1,190: Daniel 6:10-24
2-28-16, Lent 3, Bethany-Princeton MN
(Hymns: 252, 38:1, 467, 521; communion 263, 545:1-10.15-16)

“MY GOD SENT HIS ANGEL”

The Sermon Text, Daniel 6:10-24 (v. 20-23). ²⁰ And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.” ²³ Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. By Your Word settle our hearts when we see the dangers we are in the midst of, that like Daniel in the midst of lions we would be patient in the midst of adversities through trusting Your promise to guard and keep us from all evil, not because of any merit or worthiness in us but purely out of Your goodness and mercy, for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen!

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“**My God sent His angel,**” is a beautiful way to summarize Providence, which is the word that describes what God does to take care of His creation. God directly intervened to take care of Daniel. The first part of the word *Providence* is *provide*. This is what we said together: “*He richly and daily provides me,*” and we listed some things.

One of the things God provides is protection. “*He protects me from all danger, guards and keeps me from all evil.*” Daniel was protected from a brutal death. When Daniel said, “**My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths,**” how did he know this? Because he was allowed to see what God did to take care of him.

Do you know how rare this is, to see what God does to take care of you? Maybe you think you do see this. Children see their mother and father taking care of them. You are aware of the police watching our streets, the military serving abroad. You know where the food comes from. Your taxes pay for road construction. Your vehicle has to pass inspection and you have to maintain it to keep it running.

But because we see this and we are involved in so much of it, we can end up *not* thinking of it as God taking care of us but all we do to take care of ourselves. We think in these terms: “If I use my brain, if I work hard enough, if I do it well enough, then I will have what I need.” So this brings us to Daniel, who did everything well.

When we meet Daniel in this story, he is no longer a young man. When King Nebuchadnezzar started bringing the Israelites captive to Babylon, and he started with the princes of Judah and the most promising young men, Daniel was one of them. That was 66 years and several kings ago, and now a new people is in power, not the Babylonians but the Medes and Persians. Daniel had a long record of faithful and unblemished service. He had a spotless record. So now when King Darius organized his government, he appointed 120 *satraps*, regional governors, who answered to three chief administrators who would report directly to Darius. Daniel was one of these three, and now Darius was planning to put Daniel over everyone.

Of course this caused extreme jealousy. So the satraps tried to find one thing wrong with Daniel, and they couldn't. Imagine that, in this election year. We're used to political teams digging up dirt on their opponents. There was no dirt to dig up on Daniel, no skeletons in his closet. He did everything well, he was completely ethical, he was hard-working, he was honorable, he had done no wrong to anyone.

So they attacked his religious life. They knew he prayed to God every day. Three times every day he looked out his window in the direction of Jerusalem, where the temple of the Lord had been, and he prayed. Why did he do that? Because years before, when Solomon dedicated the temple, in his prayer that day he said that if ever, because of their sin, God would punish Israel by sending them away captive to another land, if they would ***“pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, then hear in heaven their prayer, and forgive Your people” (1Ki 8:46-50)***. Daniel believed this promise. He prayed with faith in this Word of God.

So now the jealous satraps had King Darius make a binding law that if anyone prayed to or worshipped a god other than the king, he would be thrown into a den of lions. This rule did not command Daniel to worship any god. He could go without worship if he wished. What it did was to forbid him from praying, for example, to the God of the Bible. Daniel could avoid the lions' den if he went without his prayers for 30 days. He was tempted to avoid being persecuted by neglecting to worship God.

What does all of this have to do with God's providence? It is this: Daniel, who had used his brain well, who had worked hard and well and long, was being tempted. He was tempted to be the one in control. He could have thought, "I've worked too hard, I've come too far, to let these guys win. I can pick up prayer again after a month. God won't mind. If something happens to me, who will do God's work in this place?" He was tempted to control the events himself – and in so doing, to deny God.

We are tempted in the same way. When trials come, sometimes we refuse to accept it. If you don't get the result or answer that you want, if people are working against you, if you are being marginalized because of your Christian faith, if you are being disappointed in your hopes, do you consider cheating in some way, or hiding the truth, or compromising your belief, or using dishonest means to get what you want?

We hear of political candidates using dishonest means to get elected. If someone uses unscrupulous tactics to get ahead of you in the working world, do you say, “I may as well do that too”? If you are running late, do you justify breaking traffic laws? If you didn’t study for the test, are you tempted to cheat because you can’t stand to get a bad grade? If you are last in line in the cafeteria and might not get a dessert, is it OK to push someone aside to get what you want? If you are last in line in traffic, is it OK to drive recklessly to get where you are going more quickly? If laws are being passed that make it harder on churches and Christians, do you think it’s OK to respond in the spirit of revenge and use ruthless and legally questionable methods to defeat those doing such things? If you are having a bad day or if you are pressed for time, is it OK to snap or crab at everyone?

The problem behind many of our sins is that we pretend we are in control. We do not see Providence in terms of God giving us the things we need. Instead we depend on ourselves to provide it: to use our brains, work hard enough, and fix it.

What you see in Daniel is someone who recognizes he is not in control. He does not try to control the situation. He epitomizes the words in the hymn we will sing in moment: *“Come when it may He’ll shield me; to Him I wholly yield me”* (#467 v. 3).

In the lions’ den Daniel gets to see what it looks like. He is allowed to actually see the angel shutting the mouths of the lions. Because the angel came from heaven, Daniel could only conclude that God was seeing everything happening to Daniel and decided to send the angel directly to where Daniel was. It showed that God cared what happened to Daniel, and in the midst of lions God would still control it all. No matter how well Daniel did everything that was in front of him, He did not have everything in front of him. Only God can see that. This is why He is in control.

So this should first *humble* you. Why do you think that you can control things? When you can’t stop worrying, really at the heart of it is a refusal to let go of this urge to control things. It is a form of idolatry, where your god is yourself, what you can do.

So bring this to the Lord. Admit what you can’t do. Ask for help. If you are humbled by this, if you are out of options like Daniel was, then you are on your knees. This is what we dread, to be out of options. But this is actually when you are in the best position possible. Being on your knees is the posture of prayer, isn’t it? What we don’t like about this is that we pray and don’t always get answers. You don’t get to see what Daniel saw. You don’t get to see the heavenly angel doing something for you.

You will just have to trust His Word. That’s what Daniel was doing. What if you aren’t very good at trusting His Word? Well, this is actually the answer. This is why Jesus came. He is the Father’s holy Child. Although Daniel did a lot of things well, he was not perfect. On the other hand, it is said of Jesus that **“He has done all things well.” ... ‘Truly this was a Righteous Man.’ ... ‘This is My beloved**

Son in whom I am well pleased.’ ”He perfectly trusted His heavenly Father. Daniel’s faith cannot save you. But Jesus’ faith saves you. It was perfect. **“He committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1Pe 2:23).** Jesus perfectly trusted and believed, to count for you. God credits you with Jesus’ perfect faith. for Jesus’ sake He sees nothing lacking in your faith. Jesus’ faith saves you.

So secondly, this *comforts* you, that God is in control and not you and sees everything. He has all situations in front of Him, and He has a large bounty of His goodness to dispense. But because of Jesus, for His sake, you know that God the Father will not forget you. Just as Daniel’s little cell was not too small or insignificant for God to send an angel to protect him, your every trouble is not too small or insignificant. It is important to God, you are important to God, for Jesus’ sake. Out of His large bountiful goodness, He sends exactly what you need where you are. Just like Daniel, you can say, “God sent His angel,” not because you see it but by faith.

You can’t see it all. But He can. And most importantly He sees you. As we sing in another Lutheran hymn:

*Not in thy hands the guidance of all events doth dwell;
God on His throne o’er-ruleth, He guideth all things well. (ELH #208 v. 7) Amen!*