

November 24, 2019 Sermon

Creative Resistance
Text: Story of Daniel

Daniel – a book with many amazing and mysterious stories – tales that the community of the faithful compiled in order to teach the community about human faithfulness and God’s enduring love and protection. While reading this book, your jaws will drop while scratching your head and say – huh? what kind of stories are these? The only apocalyptic book in the Old Testament, Daniel contains incredible, wild imagery. Great beasts with talking horns coming out from their heads, two winged lions, four winged leopards, bears with tusks made of iron that devour the earth – the visions are fantastic like watching a science fiction movie.

But there are also human beings in the book of Daniel– faithful ones who are the heroes of the book. Take for example the story of Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego – three young men who were thrown into the fiery furnace for not bowing to a golden statue created by King Nebuchadnezzar. This famous story tells us that despite the fact that the furnace was about 5000 degrees in heat, the 3 young men were unharmed and unscathed but they were joined in by a fourth person – interpreted as a guardian angel seen as God’s spirit that protected them from the deadly heat.

And then of course there was the man Daniel – the lion tamer – who was commended for his faithfulness to his God. We know his story. He was framed by his enemies – those who were jealous of his talents and looks and his seemingly good rapport with King Darius. His faithfulness to his God was used against him and he was thrown into the lion’s den. The story tells us that when the king checked on him the next day, Daniel was alive and well, uneaten by the lions. God in the form of an angel came to shut the lion’s mouths and protected Daniel. Daniel’s God is omnipotent- all powerful and omniscient – all knowing. The king then made a decree that all the people in the land will worship Daniel’s God. Incredible stories of faith!

The book of Daniel while being labeled as an apocalyptic book, is first and foremost a book about resistance and hope. It is a training ground on how to become a faithful follower of God. It is a book that teaches us to resist evil and its many forms that turns us away from God and what God stands for – be it love, justice, peace, hope or goodness. Daniel was written during the reign

of Antiochus IV Epiphanies – a wicked Syrian king who took control of the Temple in Jerusalem and ruled Israel 165 years before the birth of Jesus. It was in this period that our ancestors of faith faced extraordinary crisis that included oppression, persecution and mass murder. The book of Daniel is about loyalty and allegiance to God. Interestingly, we have left the interpretation of this fascinating book in the hands of fundamentalists. So I challenge you to read it and let me know if you were captivated or repelled by its violent content, riveting imagery and coded language. I would suggest that attending to its historical context is essential for interpreting it properly; if we do that, however, we may be confronted with a revolutionary, subversive message that speaks directly to our own times.

What is the message of Daniel's story for us today? Looking at the historical, political and religious contexts as backgrounds of this book, two questions arise: What does it mean to be faithful in a time when faithfulness seems pointless? What does it mean to resist when resistance seems futile? Daniel proved that no matter how much forces of evil are in the world, God still wins. There is no denying that forces of darkness are very much present in our world today. So we ask the question, is there any hope in our world today? Here we are, coming to the end of a liturgical year that is marked by violence and protests in Hongkong, the Turkey invasion of Syria, wildfires in Australia and California, stories of racism in Canada, and millions of refugees fleeing their homeland and awaiting doors of refuge to be opened. All these things deserve our undivided attention because human life is sacred and precious wherever it is. We are living in desperate times. And desperate times lead people to ask desperate questions: Is there any hope in our world today? What does it mean to resist evil in such a time as this? Are we in danger of being thrown into a lion's den?

Daniel teaches us to hold on – to wait – to persist – to persevere – for deliverance is coming. To hold on is for us to live now in the light of the good news that God's deliverance is near. To hold on is to live courageously and passionately for the good of the world. Daniel teaches us how to resist creatively. Creative resistance occurs when one reacts to any negative experience, be it pain, violence or death, in a creative way – like the use of art or humour or poetry to stop violence or hate.

An African-American comedian who died not too long ago by the name of Dick Gregory has been credited by most as the first African-American comedian to reach fame by challenging

racism through comedy. One of his classic jokes on this topic was about him going to a restaurant in the segregated South and being told by the white waitress, “We don’t serve colored people here.” To which Gregory replied: “That’s all right, I don’t eat colored people. Just bring me a whole fried chicken.” That’s what I call creative resistance.

Terry Fox, despite his condition, decided he would run across the entire country of Canada to raise money and awareness towards cancer research. He resisted being defined by his disability. Terry Fox, a cancer-stricken amputee, is a courageous individual, proving himself a true hero with his perseverance and ability to make a difference in the world. That is creative resistance.

Here's another excellent story of creative resistance. When a white supremacist group from Detroit also known as neo-nazis tried to host a hate rally in Knoxville, Tennessee, they were foiled by ... clowns! The clowns who were members of the Anti-Racist Action movement said to the neo-nazis – “we’re dressed like clowns but you’re the one who looks silly!”

“White Power!” the white supremacists shouted, “White Flour?” the clowns yelled back running in circles throwing flour in the air and raising separate letters which spelt “White Flour”.

“White Power!” the white supremacists angrily shouted once more, “White flowers?” the clowns cheers and threw white flowers in the air and danced about merrily.

One last time they screamed “White Power!” The clown women thought they finally understood what the Klan was trying to say. “Ohhhhh...” the women clowns said. “Now we understand...”, “WIFE POWER!” they lifted the letters up in the air, grabbed the nearest male clowns and lifted them in their arms and ran about merrily chanting “WIFE POWER! WIFE POWER! WIFE POWER!”

The clowns stole the show, they met the hatred with creativity and continued parading through the streets with the police smiling happily at their sides while the white supremacists called off their demonstration several hours early. These actions not only deflate the violent confrontation—but they also engage the community in collective actions to counter hate and racism. In the end, the actions of creative resistance bring communities together. Hate and racism don't stand a chance. That’s creative resistance against the powers of evil against the violence of this world.

Dear friends, when you can embody peace and love to such a degree that you can mock evil to its face, that's the way to resist evil in the world today. That's the way of Daniel – that's the way of Jesus in the world today. My friends, if we believe like Daniel that God wins – then we need to do something to let God win. This good news requires lives of courageous faithfulness in key moments of our lives. We are to live faithfulness in the day to day choices and actions of our lives. And if we can get to the point of moments of peace, where we can mock evil to its face, we have truly learned the way of Daniel and the way of Jesus.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Sources:

BCUC Lectionary Group

Inspired by the sermon “Daniel & the Lion’s Den Revisited” by Rev. J. Michael Solberg

Sarah Freeman Woolpert, “Why Nazis are so Afraid of These Clowns”, commondreams.org

Dick Gregory, theguardian.com

Terry Fox, Wikipedia.