

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. <sup>12</sup> 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 man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

<sup>16</sup> 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!”

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. <sup>20</sup> 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?”

<sup>21</sup> Daniel answered, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> 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, O king.”

<sup>23</sup> 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.

In the name of our loving and powerful God, dear friends,

As we open the pages of God’s Holy Word today, we find the historical account of an older Jewish man serving in the Babylonian government under King Darius. You may remember the story of Daniel in the Lion’s Den and were reminded of the details of that story as we read the account from Daniel chapter six earlier. What a fitting text it is for a Reformation Sunday sermon! Let’s consider together a Reformation Story that strengthens our firm trust in the Lord and assures us that

### **GOD CAN SHUT THE LIONS’ MOUTHS!**

Daniel was a faithful believer. He was one of those Jews carried off into captivity in Babylon when the Babylonians conquered God’s people in Judah. He worked for the king as a high official and did so well and was so trustworthy that King Darius was about to make Daniel ruler over the whole kingdom. Daniel’s co-workers, the wise men of Babylon, were naturally upset and envious that this man who worshiped a different god was going to get the promotion. They concocted a devious plan based on the very fact that Daniel was a believer in the one true God.

They buttered up the king by telling him that everyone agreed that no one should pray to anyone or anything but the king himself. In fact, they said, if anyone prays to any god or man during the next 30 days, they should be thrown into the lions den to die! This sounded like a fine idea to King Darius, so he issued the decree.

These evil men knew that nothing would stop Daniel from worshiping God. This is how they would get rid of him once and for all! And Daniel did break the king's law by praying to God. Those men just "happened" to find Daniel praying up in his room and they brought him before the king for punishment.

Even to the king's dismay, there was no way to get around the law. It was the kind of Medo-Persian edict or decree that could not be repealed. The law stood and the punishment had to be carried out. Daniel had to be thrown into the lions' den. This was a cruel and torturous punishment. Imagine how scary it must have been to see those huge, powerful lions, up to 9 feet long, roaring and foaming at the mouth as they anticipated their dinner! The verse right after our text for today tells us how those huge beasts could rip people apart. That verse tells us, ***At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.***

What we call the lions' den was very likely a big cave with an opening into it on one side where the lions would enter and another opening in the top through which the people were lowered down into it. That side opening was blocked by a large stone and then sealed shut. The big stone was probably the kind that could be rolled open and shut on a stone track—much like the stone that sealed the tomb of Jesus hundreds of years later. The seal on the entrance was wax or clay put around the edges and would have had the imprint of king's and nobles' seals. That stone could not be removed without the approval of the king and his nobles, so that no one would be able to rescue the person fed to the lions.

As we know, Daniel was a faithful believer. He trusted in God and was even willing to be thrown to certain death by the lions for praying to God. He would not give up his worship of the LORD, no matter what they threatened. We know a New Testament passage that tells us that we must obey God rather than men. Daniel certainly felt that way too!

But we also know that Daniel wasn't perfect either. In the verse just prior to our text, Daniel says, ***I was found innocent in his (God's) sight.*** Daniel is talking about being innocent in regard to this human law of King Darius. God knew that Daniel had done what was right as he prayed. Darius was the one who was wrong to make a law like that. Daniel was not the kind to break laws and cause trouble for the king. He was well-respected. He was 80 years old and had served in the government for 60 years. But despite his trustworthiness to the king and his faithfulness to his God, Daniel was not perfect. Daniel was a human being, which means that he was sinful. The Bible tells us that as soon as we are born into this world, we have sin in us, and as we go through life, we do all sorts of things that go against God's will. Every person—and Daniel was no exception—needs God's forgiveness. Daniel's trust in the LORD and his hope for a Savior from his sin is what moved him to pray in spite of the law prohibiting it.

So faithful Daniel was lowered into the sealed lion cave because he dared to live for his God. The next morning, it was the king who first heard the words from Daniel's own mouth which are recorded for every generation to read and hear: ***My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me...*** God sent an angel to protect Daniel. If you believe that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God...if you believe that the Holy Spirit himself breathed into the writers the very words of God to record and that indeed the Bible is HOLY Scripture...then you trust that this is an historical account and you know for sure that **GOD CAN SHUT THE LIONS' MOUTHS!**

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Yes, but *"Why is this a Reformation story?"* you may be asking. Did God's faithful child, Daniel, become a great reformer and swing a pagan nation over to the side of the Lord? It is true that Daniel's staunch faithfulness to God, unflinching in the face of cruel and powerful kings, did force several kings to acknowledge the sovereignty of the LORD, but reforming an entire country by his messages from God—like Jonah had done in the Assyrian capital—was not what happened. Daniel was a high-ranking Wise Man—perhaps very much like one of those Magi who came to see the young Jesus in Bethlehem—but despite his strong faith and public witnessing about the one true God, he was not responsible for religious reformation in Babylon.

Here is why his story is appropriate for today, however: the story of Daniel is not really a story about Daniel just like the story of the Reformation of the Christian Church is not really a story about Martin Luther. Both stories have a lot more to do with our God and what he does!

Just as Daniel was a faithful witness and mouthpiece for God before kings and other powerful people, so was Martin Luther. Luther faithfully represented the LORD and his saving Word before the likes of Pope Leo X, head of the Christian Church, and the political leader, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

Like Daniel, Luther had to say some unpopular things to some very popular and powerful people. The thing credited with setting off the reform so necessary in the Church was his posting of the 95 Theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Posting his statements on what was kind of like the city bulletin board was really an invitation to discuss and debate troublesome teaching and practices in the Church. These 95 statements centered on repentance, forgiveness and the selling of indulgences, that is, the paying money for forgiveness of sins.

Daniel was told to pray to the king and not to God. He would not do so. He would pray to the LORD just as he always had. In the same way that Daniel did what was right in the face of persecution and certain death, so did Luther. There was no way you opposed the world's most powerful ruler AND the extremely powerful pope and live! Others had tried. Among the most well-known was John Hus, who like Luther stood before the authorities and was told to recant. He did not, so he was led out and burned

at the stake. His death in 1415 reminds us to be faithful in the face of persecution and that the LORD may at times use the sinful actions of others as the means to bring his people home to heaven. But Daniel and Luther stand as reminders that, as he wills, **GOD CAN SHUT THE LIONS' MOUTHS!**

Daniel stood face to face with ferocious lions and lived because GOD SHUT THEIR MOUTHS. Pope Leo X—whose name means “Lion”—had his MOUTH SHUT when he went face to face with Luther! He had spoken to Luther through a document called a papal bull, titled *Exsurge Domine* (“Arise, O Lord”). It condemned Luther’s writings and commanded him to recant, to take back the things he had written and said about the Church’s teachings. The Lion gave him 60 days to do this or Luther would be excommunicated—branded as a heretic, kicked out of the church, and threatened with execution. As Daniel would not let the authorities keep him from speaking to God or let lions frighten him, Luther would not let the authorities keep him from speaking the truth of God or let the Lion frighten him.

One of the “angels” used by God to save Luther was Elector Frederick, the German prince of Luther’s region. He made sure that Luther had safe passage as he travelled and even had him “kidnapped” once by masked horsemen and taken to the fortress of Wartburg Castle so that he would not be killed as the conflict with the Church raged on.

It was a sad time in the history of the Christian Church that its leaders wielded this kind of ugly power. Even worse, they would not listen to the clear words of Scripture that proclaimed that the forgiveness of sins is the free gift of God’s grace because of the sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ.

That’s all Luther wanted to talk about and all he wanted the Church to proclaim—that we are saved by Faith Alone in God’s Grace Alone. It is not by living a good life and doing good things that a person finds God’s love and forgiveness and the promise of heaven. It is in Christ Alone—his perfect life, his death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead—that a person finds God’s love and forgiveness and the promise of heaven. The fact that this saving gospel is what is preached from this pulpit every week is evidence that **GOD SHUT THE LIONS' MOUTHS** at the time of the Church’s Reformation.

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The story of Daniel is the story of faith in God, a story of faith in the face of persecution, a story of God’s upholding his child, a story of a bold and public witness for God. That is exactly the story of Martin Luther, the greatest of the Church’s Reformers. And it is YOUR story too!

You may never be a high-ranking government official like Daniel, whose life is chronicled in God’s Book for people of all time to read. You may never be a supremely gifted theologian who ranks in the top three on about every list of the most important people of the last 1,000 years. But you are—and by faith you always will be—a child of

God just like they were. Jesus also came for you. And for you too, **GOD CAN SHUT THE LIONS' MOUTHS!**

Wild beasts, unsuspecting kings, wicked church officials—those might not be the kind of “lions” you face today, but you face some.

In this country, you have the freedom to pray, but if you humbly do so at school someone might make fun of you. Daniel's example is a good one for you if that's the case, isn't it? His story might remind us to not be afraid of what other people say or do, but trust in the LORD. And the same is true for adults who are afraid to pray when out to eat or when at work.

When you're dating and you set certain standards of behavior for your relationship, you might be ridiculed. You might even lose someone you really care about because you want to do what pleases God.

Your stand on Sunday worship as a priority in your life, your desire to be in God's house to have him come to you in Word and sacrament, can cost you a promotion at work or a position on a travelling club team.

The way you talk and the things you do (and won't do!) mean that some friends kind of drift away.

Your pastors and church leaders know this too—even those who profess to be Christians won't listen when we talk to them about God's will for marriage or worship or any number of things.

Persecuted because of your faith, because you represent the one true God? Yes, it happens. It happens every day to people who live their faith in God and witness his love to the world. You and I face different “lions,” but they're lions nonetheless. Instead of stressing about it, instead of faltering and failing in your faith, instead of giving in to pressure to deny your God, have confidence that **GOD CAN SHUT THE LIONS' MOUTHS!** He can take care of you!

You trust that Jesus lived and died for you. You trust that God did something as huge as take all your sins away. You trust that Christ's death on the cross means eternal life for you. Trust also that he **CAN SHUT THE LIONS' MOUTHS!** He worked things out for Daniel's good in 580 BC. He protected and prospered and promoted Martin Luther in the 1500s. He certainly can do the same today for the people he loves so much that he sent his Son for them! In the face of trouble and persecution for your faith, your God can rescue and take care of you too. Remember this Reformation Story. Let it inspire you to trust in the Lord. Amen.

**Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**