

Sermon, Making Time, July 10, 2022 by Linda Worth

As Pauline mentioned, our theme for today under the broad theme of “Seeking God Together” is “Making Time.” Do you have trouble making time for God each day? How often in a day do you pray or communicate with God? Today we are looking at the story of Daniel in the Lion’s den to see what it can teach us about our practice of prayer and its place in our daily routine.

As I prepared for this morning three songs kept running through my mind. The first, I recall singing in Sunday School. It is “Dare to be a Daniel.” The chorus goes like this:

“Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone
Dare to have a purpose true, dare to make it known.”

This song invites me to dare to be like Daniel. Dare to be different than the world around me in order to be faithful to God and not hiding my relationship with God.

The second song is one I recall singing with my mother while we were doing dishes. The first verse goes like this:

Whisper a prayer in the morning, whisper a prayer at noon.
Whisper a prayer in the evening, to keep your heart in tune.

This song challenges me to pray or communicate with God multiple times a day to keep in tune with God. I think these two songs highlight some of the invitations from today’s story of Daniel in the lion’s den. I’ll get to the 3rd song later.

As you listened to the dramatic scripture reading from Daniel 6 verses 1-23, what stood out for you? Did you experience any invitations from God? Here are some things that stood out for me along with some of the invitations I experienced.

First, Daniel must have been a very busy man if he and two others were supervising the governors of 120 states. I sensed the Spirit’s invitation to always make time to prayer regardless of how busy I am and maybe ... especially when I am very busy.

Second, I noticed Daniel’s character was such that others could find no fault with the way he did his work. He was always honest, listened to the King and was faithful to God. These are characteristics I can have as well – I can be honest, a good listener and faithful to God.

And thirdly, I noticed Daniel was willing to risk his life to pray as he routinely did. I sensed the invitation to look at my own prayer habits and wondered: Is my prayer life as important to me as Daniel’s was to him? Would I risk my life to pray? What made Daniel willing to risk his life to pray as he always did. I decided to look at Daniel chapters 1 to 5 to see if they would help me get to know Daniel and better understand him.

From these earlier chapters I learned, or was reminded of, things like: Daniel and 3 of his friends were among the many young Jewish men, taken as prisoners by the Babylonian army, when King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem. They were taken to the city of Babylon, 2,700 kms. away. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his chief official to choose from these captives some young men who were: healthy, handsome, smart, wise, educated, and fit to serve in the royal palace. They were to be

trained for three years to speak and write the language, before becoming court officials. Daniel and three friends were part of the group chosen.

Somehow, I doubt that it was because Daniel was deemed healthy, handsome, smart, wise, educated, and fit to serve in the royal palace that he dared to risk his life in order to pray as he always did.

I noticed that when Daniel was chosen to be in the king's court, the first thing he did, was ask that he and his 3 friends be able to eat only what God had approved for his people rather than the rich food and wine that the King decried. The King's chief official was afraid to grant him this request. He was sure if Daniel and his friends ate something else, they wouldn't be as healthy as the other captives. If the king found out they weren't given what he ordered, it might cost him his life!

But Daniel was able to convince a guard to give them a 10-day trial period of eating only vegetables and drinking water. After the trial period, when he and his 3 friends looked healthier than all the other young captives, they were allowed to continue with their chosen diet and be true to God. I saw that Daniel was a young person who took his faith seriously.

I also noticed in these chapters that Daniel was gifted by God with the ability to interpret dreams and that he recognized that he needed God's help in order to do it. When praised by the King, he immediately attributed his ability to the one true God. I saw that Daniel acknowledged that his gift came from God, he depended on God, was humble and gave credit where credit was due.

I noticed the time he asked his friends to join him in praying for wisdom to know and explain King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. I saw that support of his faith community was important to Daniel.

When God showed Daniel in a vision King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its meaning, Daniel made time to praise and thank God, even before sharing the dream and its meaning with the King. I saw that Daniel made God his first priority!

I noted that King Darius was the third King in whose royal courts Daniel worked, and that by today's story Daniel was an old man – probably in his 80's. I concluded that his relationship with God throughout his life and sustained by his daily pattern of prayers of intercession and thanksgivings, was the reason he was willing to risk his life to pray as he always did.

I realized Daniel was not unique in his prayer routine. It was part of his Jewish faith tradition. You may recall psalms that mention praying in the morning, and evening or morning, noon and night. In the gospels we see Jesus continued the Jewish tradition of praying morning and night as well as many times, in between.

The book of Acts refers to the early church gathering frequently to pray together. Pentecost happened when the followers of Jesus were together praying. After Pentecost the followers of Jesus "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread ... and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42) Peter and John healed a lame man on the temple steps as they all gathered for

prayers. Praying together continued as a part of daily life in the early church, shaping their days around Scripture and prayer, most often the Lord's Prayer.

I wonder why we no longer have prayer routines like Daniel and the early church? I came across some possible reasons. During the times of persecution, the early Christians held worship services in the catacombs and added to the traditional prayers of the Jewish people. They ended up praying every three hours. Overtime only priests, monks and nuns continued this practise. They also added songs, readings, and responses making all these prayer times difficult for ordinary people to do.

Another reason might be that during the Reformation, many Protestants and Anabaptists initially rejected much of the Catholic liturgy, only then to later develop their own spiritual rituals and practices around prayer. Also because of persecution, Anabaptists did not have much option of praying together. And, later, with the Industrial Revolution and urbanization, people lost the rural rhythms that encouraged praying together. Individualism spread and personal devotions became the norm.

I struggled in my early years to communicate with God or pray. I was uncomfortable with my prayers consisting of mainly requests, with a few "thank you's. I dutifully read scripture or a devotional reading but I paid more attention to getting it done then listening for God's invitations to me. I understood prayer to be more talking than listening. Praying with others was not comfortable.

Thankfully, over the years my definition of prayer has broadened and there has been a renewed interest in spirituality and prayer in the wider church with more prayer resources being provided. I am thankful to have learned about many spiritual disciplines and fixed hour prayers is one more. I personally have never prayed at "fixed hours" using the same prayers that others in my community are using at the same time, although my prayer routine does include praying morning and evening. I have appreciated being a part of small groups that used prayer books or things like Lenten Guided Prayer materials and then met to share from our experiences. Prayer books can be used by individuals praying at the same time of day as others or whenever it fits one's schedule.

There are two or three prayer books from our own faith tradition on the library shelf in the foyer. "Praying with the Anabaptists – The Secret of Bearing Fruit" is one of them. Each of the 15 meditations include a selected scripture from John 15-17 focusing on the vine and the branches parable. Meditations include reflections on the text, a hymn, words from early Anabaptists, a martyr's prayer and are followed by a guided prayer exercise.

"Take Our Moments and Our Days, An Anabaptist Prayer Book," has two volumes as well as a free app to download on your phone. Volume 1 is for Ordinary Time and Volume II, Advent through Pentecost <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/take-our-moments-and-our-days/id1299477456> It provides daily mediations for morning and evening prayers over a period of four weeks on the themes of the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, the Parables and Signs and Wonders. It suggests that if you are not in the habit of using a prayer book it is best to begin with either morning or evening prayers.

Christian Formation & Worship Ministry is planning to send out a survey asking what topics would be of interest for a deeper study in the fall. If prayer is something in which you are interested, be sure to

indicate that. I suppose there is no need to wait until the fall to begin using a prayer book. You could start anytime on your own or you could ask a friend or two to join you and then meet in person or zoom to share from your experiences. The important thing is to make time to communicate with God in a way that works for us. My prayer is that the story of Daniel will inspire each of us to evaluate our prayer lives, look at our priorities, and support each other in finding prayer routines that are meaningful.

In closing I wanted to share one more song from my childhood.

The first verse has kept running through my mind when preparing for today.

It is Take Time To Be Holy. It reminds me of the many invitations
I experienced in the story of Daniel in the lion's den.

Because it is not written in modern English,
I have translated for myself these invitations.

I'll share it with you line by line along with my translations.

Afterwards we can all join in singing it as our Hymn of Response

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.

Make time to be holy and communicate often w/God
Stay connected to God (vine & branches image)
and be nourished by scripture. ("Feed" not "read")

Make friends of God's children,
help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Build community
and support each other
Remember to always pray for guidance.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Make time with God a priority
Communicate a lot secretly with Jesus
Follow J's example and become like him
Friends will see Jesus in the way I live.

3. Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide.
And run not before Him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.

Make time to be guided by Jesus
Wait for direction no matter what.
Whether happy or sad, follow Jesus.
Look to Jesus and trust him.

4. Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

Make time to let J help me be calm
Let J control my thoughts/motives
God's spirit will pour out God's love for me
Which will equip me to serve others.

Let us now sing Take Time to Be Holy as our Hymn of Response.