Reformation
*Daniel 6:10-12,16-23*
“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word”

The theme of our sermon for today, “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” is the first line of a very famous Reformation hymn written by Martin Luther. This hymn was written for a special service as a prayer against the threatening Turkish army. The version that we have in our hymnal is quite different than the version that Martin Luther originally wrote in 1541. Our present hymnal reads,

“Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word;
Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would seek to overthrow your Son
And to destroy what he has done” (CW 203:1).

The Lutheran Hymnal has a similar version to the new hymnal:

“Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done” (TLH 261:1).

The old little black Evangelical Lutheran Hymn Books that came out in 1927 have a translation of this hymn that is the most similar to the German words that Luther originally wrote,

“Lord, keep us in Thy Word and work,
Restrain the murderous Pope and Turk,
Who fain would tear from off Thy throne
Christ Jesus, Thy beloved Son” (ELHB 274:1).

There are many today who think that the words that Luther used are too strong for a proper prayer. We would have to say that Luther’s original words are not politically correct by today's standards. People today consider the Pope a kindly, old, grandfather with some good advice for people. And as far as the Turks were concerned that Luther referred to, people today would say that there really isn’t much difference between Jesus and Mohammed, so Luther should just try and look for the good in both religions. The problem with this way of thinking is that it fails to recognize that Luther wrote these words in a time of war with the Turkish people and the papacy. It further fails to recognize the damage that these people were doing. They were murderers, both of the body, but even worse—murderers of souls, for the country of Turkey was and is today a Muslim country.

The struggle that Martin Luther found himself in was not a new one in the history of the world. Take the life of Daniel as an example. He was in a similar struggle to that of Martin Luther. They both were under attack by Satan for holding steadfastly to the true faith. As we look at the life of Daniel, we will apply his situation to our lives and see that Satan often uses different methods today, but he still attacks us just the same. We then also pray along with Luther, “Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word.” Keep us steadfast in the truth, and keep us steadfast under persecution.

I. Remain steadfast in the truth

Do you realize that you are being watched? Now more than ever, all of us are being watched, more than we realize. There are security cameras in most stores that you shop in, and
as you shop, people are watching you. Certain intersections have cameras that take pictures of people going through red lights. There are cameras at toll booths. Credit card companies are watching what you buy. Phone companies are watching whom you are calling and who’s calling you. And you will never know how closely you are being watched as you surf the internet.

Today, we are going to be looking at a man who was being watched—Daniel. Daniel was dedicated to serving God, and as he served God faithfully and openly in his life, he was being watched. By the time these events took place, Daniel was an older man, perhaps even in his 80’s. He had been serving God openly all his life. And he had been serving in the government. He and the rest of the Jews were in captivity, living in a foreign land under a foreign ruler. But God had blessed Daniel during this time, allowing him to be given positions of power and influence in the foreign governments that ruled over the land.

A man named Darius became ruler, and he set up a new system of government in which Daniel was one of the top administrators under the king. Daniel served faithfully in that position, and he was so successful that he was so successful that the king was planning to promote him above all the other government officials. Some of those officials didn’t like it that Daniel, a Jew, would be higher in rank than they, and so they plotted against him. And as they plotted, they noticed something about Daniel. “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God” (5). You see, Daniel was openly worshiping God. It was obvious to everyone, including the people who didn’t like him. Daniel’s enemies knew that the only way to get Daniel was to do something against his religion.

And so they plotted his demise. They had the king make up a law that for one month, no one could pray to any god except the king. Anyone who prayed to a god must be thrown into the lion’s den. The king liked this idea—it appealed to his ego. And so he put the decree in writing. It became a law.

Now since Daniel was such a high ranking government official, he learned about this law immediately. He knew that people would be watching him. Daniel was now faced with a decision. He had several options. He could try to outwit his opponents by some scheme. He could give in to their plot and not pray to the Lord any more—after all, if Daniel lost his life or his political position, he would no longer be able to help the Jewish exiles. Or possibly he could pray to the Lord through King Darius? Maybe he could just stop praying for that month? He maybe could pray in secret instead of praying out the widow facing the temple in Jerusalem, as was his custom, since there was no command in the Bible to pray this way. He could have worshiped God secretly instead of openly, just to stay out of trouble.

But that’s not what he did. “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” (10). “I’m not going to cover up my faith,” Daniel probably thought. “I’m going to keep praying. I’m going to keep serving God. I’m going to worship him openly, just as I have done all my life. I will not hide my faith.” This was Daniel’s routine, to openly spend time with God three times a day, meditating on his Word, and praying.

Would you have done what Daniel did? Would you have continued to openly worship God, honor him, pray to him openly, even when you know that people are watching you? What if you are at a dinner with other people, and normally, you pray before you eat? But tonight you’re eating with people that aren’t Christians, and aren’t interested in becoming Christian. What would you do? Would you pray? You don’t have to stop the meal and make a big spectacle of yourself. But would you pause, fold your hands, look down, close your eyes, and
just for a few moments, silently thank God for the food he has given you? Would you do that, even though you know that people will be watching? Or, do you hide your faith? Maybe skip praying, or pray in a real secret way, so that no one can see what you are doing?

This is a sin that we often fall into. God has placed us into a country where we are free to express our religious beliefs, but we are cowards. We hide our beliefs. We make up excuses about not wanting to offend anyone, but in reality, we are just plain cowards. We read the Bible when no one is looking. We pray when no one is looking. We only talk about our beliefs around other church people. “People are watching,” we say to ourselves, “and I’m afraid of what might happen if people notice my faith.”

How good it is, that we have a God who forgives us. Our Savior Jesus Christ, is the same God that Daniel prayed to. He doesn’t punish us for our sins of weaknesses. He doesn’t punish us for our shortcomings. Instead, Jesus Christ forgives us. Jesus Christ is not just a picture on the wall. He is our God, and he proved his love to us when he came down to this world as a man, not to punish us, but to work out our salvation. He allowed himself to be killed on a cross, and this was his way of paying for our sins. And then he rose from the dead, proving that he really is our God, and that our sins really are forgiven. You are completely and totally forgiven for all the times you have covered up our faith. Christ has paid for that sin on the cross. And now, he gives you the strength to become more like Daniel, to live your Christian faith openly in your life.

II. Remain steadfast under persecution

People were watching. We are told in verse 11 that his enemies “went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.” Then they went and told the king. Now the king liked Daniel because Daniel was his top administrator. He didn’t want him to be killed over some silly law about praying to the king. He realized that he had been deceived by Daniel’s enemies, but he was afraid to do anything about it. And so he had Daniel thrown into the lion’s den, as a form of execution. Look at the words he spoke in verse 16 to Daniel: “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!” Everyone knew that Daniel as a man who served his God continually. It was not a secret, and the king acknowledged it.

After throwing Daniel into the lion’s den, the king couldn’t sleep. His conscience wouldn’t let him rest, because he knew that he had sentenced an innocent man to death. Early in the morning, the king ran to the lion’s den, and listen to his words in verse 20: “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom your serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” Look at Daniel’s reply, in verse 21: “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions.” God had been watching, “They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.” By saving Daniel from the lions, God declared that Daniel was innocent of any wrong doing. The king’s servants pulled Daniel out of the lion’s den, and to their shock and amazement, they found no scratches on him—nothing at all. People were watching Daniel, but more importantly, the Lord was watching over Daniel.

Today we celebrate the Reformation of the Church. Martin Luther certainly had his lions den to face. The lions he faced were different. Like Daniel, Luther’s enemies demanded that he recant his faith—or else. What should he do? Take it all back? His words are still famous: “Unless I am convinced by proofs from Scriptures or by plain and clear reasons and arguments, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I
stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” People were watching. Luther was no coward. He boldly witnessed to the truth.

Do we still face persecution today? We do, but it is much different than Daniel’s or Luther’s persecution. Here in America, there aren’t too many lion’s dens for us to be thrown in. People aren’t burned at the stake anymore like they were in Luther’s time. Satan has not left us without persecution, though. Satan now uses a more subtle attack. He tries to slowly pull us away from his Word. He entices us with the pleasures of the world. He gets us to stay away from church by any way possible. He may convince us church isn’t worth the time we take to go there. He will convince us to neglect his Word because we don’t like something that the church is doing. He will convince us to neglect God’s Word to avoid seeing someone who quarrels with us. He tells us that our time would be spent better watching TV or sleeping rather than reading and hearing his Word. He tempts us to look to other churches that don’t tell us that there is sin in our lives. Satan’s attacks are just as fierce as they ever were. Instead of trying to get us to deny our faith, he now tempts us to not care about our faith. Instead of trying to get us to recant God’s Word, he leads us to want to change parts of it, or not even pick it up at all. Satan is going to keep up his persecution upon us. He won’t let up. Not all people will be delivered from persecution in a miraculous way like Daniel was, but God promises blessing to those who remain steadfast in his truth under persecution. His Word says, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10).

What are your lion’s dens that Satan threatens you with? Is your home a lion’s den because a spouse or other family members make you feel badly for coming to this church? Is your workplace the lion’s den where people treat you differently or with less respect that the others because of your faith? Do you find yourselves praying that God would shut the mouths of the lion’s when you are in the lion’s den, yet God doesn’t seem to be answering? Satan continues to attack our faith to this day. We dare not underestimate Satan’s attacks today. He would very much like it if we did. We dare not rely on ourselves to resist his attacks, for we will surely fail. Just as Daniel did, we need to pray for God’s help. We ask that he would help us to remain steadfast in his Word. It is in God’s Word that we have the message of salvation by grace—salvation that comes freely to all people—salvation through the death of our Savior Jesus Christ. While on this earth God promises not to leave us fend for ourselves. He promises to answer our prayers when we call upon him in the day of trouble. Luther’s hymn is an excellent prayer for God’s help. We have heard the first verse, the final two verses are equally as important:

Lord Jesus Christ, your pow’r make known
For you are Lord of Lord’s alone
Defend your Christendom that we
May sing your praise eternally.

O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth.
Support us in our final strife,
And lead us out of death to life.

May God keep us all steadfast in his Word throughout our lives. Amen.