**August 4, 2019**

**Daniel 6:1-27**

The prophet Daniel was a Jewish man living in exile. He was a slave in Babylon, chosen because he was educated and handsome and from the noble Jewish class. Daniel wasn’t just a normal slave doing grunt work; he had power and prominence. He worked in the royal courts. King Darius appointed him as an official – with power over Babylon’s citizens. And that power and privilege made others jealous. Their jealousy was the root of Daniel’s problems; it prompted political games and sabotage. So it was that other officials schemed and plotted his downfall.

People knew that Daniel was so good, so excellent (as it was recorded in Chapter 6) that his only fault – and the only way they could bring him down – was through his practice of his faith (which was quite different from the local custom of idol worship). Other people did what the king asked. Other people prayed to statues and idols. Other people changed their practices as those in power demanded. But Daniel? Daniel maintained *his* faith practice regardless of the laws passed and rituals observed. He prayed every day. He kept kosher. He talked to God and listened to God and stayed in relationship with YHWH, whom he loved.

Daniel showed us that faithfulness is noticeable. The other government officials *noticed* the way that he was different from everyone else… because we are accustomed to seeing people live selfishly and act on our whims – to the point of being flakey. We expect people to be faithful when it is convenient, so it is memorable when someone maintains faithfulness despite opposition or inconvenience. We *notice* when someone says a blessing before eating their food in a restaurant. We *notice* when a stranger offers to help carry groceries or fix a flat tire. We *notice* when someone skips their sports team’s Sunday morning practice and goes to worship instead. We notice when someone’s faithfulness and priorities remain unchanged, despite peer pressures, foolish leaders or cultural shifts.

Even Mahatma Gandhi *noticed* Daniel’s faithfulness, and deemed him a model of passive resistance. Daniel was more interested in his faith and adherence to core beliefs than he was to civil obedience or even organized civil dis-obedience. Daniel “kept calm and carried on”, pursuing his faith despite every obstacle presented: legal limits, job insecurity, and threats to his life. And because of this, he is one of the heroes of our faith.

Today I have an acronym based on the word “FAITH” to help us take Daniel’s story out of worship, and lead us to more faithful living ourselves:

First, **Follow**. Like Daniel, we should not **follow** any old king; we should not follow our king or earthly ruler, but **follow** The King. YHWH. Almighty God: the King of Kings. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said there are times when, "I must be disobedient to *a* king in order to be obedient to *the* King." [[1]](#footnote-1) Such was Daniel’s actions. He followed The King, YHWH, not a king. Not Darius. Daniel was disobedient to a king in order to be obedient to The King. While his disobedience to Darius caused trouble and threatened to undo him, ultimately Daniel trusted that his obedience to God would lead him to life. His faithfulness taught him who to follow and how to follow.

So must we know who to follow, and how to follow God. There are times when we must be disobedient to our earthly kings and rulers in order to be obedient to God, the King of Kings. There are times when we must ignore whatever shenanigans are happening in our government, keep calm and carry on with what we know to be true. That could require changing our political party affiliation, helping a stranger or outcast deemed unworthy by our government, or simply investing our time and energy in things that don’t pay homage to our earthly powers and principalities. Our loyalty is first and foremost to God. Our priority is first and foremost the practice of our faith. God and country are not equal authorities for Christians.

So the first was **Follow**. The second is **Always**. **Follow Always.** Daniel always followed God faithfully. Everyday. Even into fear. Even into danger. Daniel knew that it was better to **always** walk with God, than to stay behind or venture elsewhere.

In that, Daniel followed with **Intention**. Daniel was intentional in the way he practiced faith. His life-long preparation – years of prayers and conversation with God, daily habits of praying at certain times and in certain postures – built a strength of faith that allowed him to **intentionally** follow God into the lion’s den.

This is the value of daily prayer and scripture reading. Those who don’t practice an intentional daily meditation accept a haphazard faith. Faith becomes something that happens willy-nilly, when it’s convenient for *me*, instead of an intentional, specific priority because that is what God asks of us. And without an intentional, regular, rhythmic practice, our faith is automatically *un*-intentional, *ir*-regular, and out of sync, leaving us in a weakened condition to meet life’s daily challenges, and especially life’s biggest challenges. We must **intentionally** invest in our relationship with God.

Fourth, Daniel *knew* what was true. He saw through the muddy waters of the world directly to the **Truth** found only in God. As Jesus told Pilate centuries later, “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,” leaving Pilate bumfuzzled and asking, “What is truth?” [[2]](#footnote-2) *Daniel* didn’t have to ask. Daniel *knew* the **truth**, and he was thus able to live by (and act into) the **truth**. Darius may have been king, but his was not the power to fear. His were not the laws to follow. Daniel knew that God alone.

Finally, Daniel lived with **Humility**. He was a privileged man, but not once does the story tell us that Daniel lorded his power or privilege over anyone else – slave or free. Not once did Daniel abuse his power. (like King David, who slept with another man’s wife, or Peter, who denied Jesus, or many of our other biblical heroes). Daniel’s life proclaimed: it’s not about me. It’s about God.

**Follow** [God] **Always Intentionally** with **Truth and Humility. FAITH.** It’s a handy way to live. When we do so, we recognize our identity as children of God, our responsibility as children of God, and our interactions with all of God’s other children. For when we live this way, we are investing our whole selves, we are getting our hands dirty with the work of faith. And when we do so, we are living out our baptism. **Follow** [God] **Always Intentionally** with **Truth and Humility.** Take Daniel’s faithfulness as a model for your own. It’s something to live by. Amen.

1. <http://notoriousbiggins.blogspot.com/2010/01/but-if-not-sermon-by-martin-luther-king.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John 18:37-38 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)