

Heroes of the Faith
Daniel: The Problem of Power
Daniel 6: 10-16

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It was a large, impressive waiting room stocked with the latest magazines and furnished with the finest of furniture. On this particular day the place was packed with people waiting to see one of several physicians. In one corner of that waiting room, there sat an elderly lady crying. At first, she cried quietly, but as the hopes and fears of all years gushed forward she began to weep openly. There was a little boy sitting across the room playing with toys he found in his mother's purse. As the elderly lady wept, the little boy was moved. He climbed down from his chair and toddled over to the lady and touching her on the cheek said, "It's all right, it's all right, everything is going to be all right!"

"It's all right, it's all right, everything is going to be all right." Is that a trite statement or an unusual truth? That's what I want to ponder today. The words seem to be always on our lips. A kid strikes out at his little league game, the coach says, "That's all right." A guest spills coffee on fine linen, a hostess says, "That's all right." A child cries in the night, and a loving mother whispers, "It's all right." Often it is all right. The kid will bat again. The linens will be washed. The child will fall asleep, but not always!

Lewis Smedes writes about traveling from Los Angeles to Michigan to visit his college friend of 30 years who was dying of cancer. "For three days, Cal and I talked about our past and his future as only good friends should and do. When time came for me to go, Cal looked deep into my eyes and said, 'It's all right, Lew, it's all right. Everything is going to be all right.' As I embraced his wife in the hallway, and bid his four children good-bye and wept bitterly in my car, I knew there was nothing all right about it. It was all wrong and yet, my friend had found something precisely all right in a place where everything was all wrong. How could this be?"

IT'S ALL RIGHT BECAUSE GOD IS ABLE.

The story of Daniel is one of the most delightful stories in the Old Testament. It is the story of a man who knew how to make things all right when everything was all wrong. Daniel was carried off to Babylon as a Hebrew captive. In this strange land, Daniel proved himself beneficial to kings and kingdoms. He knew how to interpret dreams. He knew how to lead people. When we catch up with Daniel in Chapter 6, he is King Darius' right-hand man. Such power creates jealousy and by some clever political maneuvers, Daniel is sentenced to the lion's den. King Darius gives the order with deep regret sentencing him with this comment, "*May your God, whom you serve continually rescue you!*" When these lions become tame as kittens, the

king is overjoyed. Even a pagan king wanted Daniel's God to deliver him.

Sometimes I wonder, What has happened to the God who delivered Noah from the Flood, Daniel from the Lion's Den, and raised Jesus from the dead? I noticed that marketers for KFC are refining the image of Colonel Sanders – straightening up his tie, rolling out his wrinkles, and slimming him down a bit to make him more appealing to the 21st century. Have we been conned into domesticating God, making God a projection of our own image instead of finding the image of God in us? Have we reduced God to politics? Have we made God the Almighty, a gentle old Santa Claus? Does our God still plant his footsteps upon the sea or do we allow him to only tiptoe through the tulips? Has our Mighty Fortress become a flimsy consolation? When the furnace is heated seven times hotter than usual, and the lions are salivating for their supper, I need a mighty God, an omnipotent God, a God who speaks and listening to his voice, new life the dead receive.

Sandy and I are so blessed by all your prayers, love, and care. You are doing exactly what you need to do as we make this new journey together. One of our newer members sent me a card this week that especially caught my attention. It was entitled the Oak Tree and it went like this:

A mighty wind blew night and day
It stole the oak tree's leaves away,
Then snapped its bough and pulled its bark
Until the oak was tired and stark.
But still the oak tree held its ground
While other trees fell all around,
The weary wind gave up and spoke
"How can you still be standing, oak?"
The oak tree said, "I know that you
Can break each branch of mine in two,
Carry every leaf away,
Shake my limbs and make me sway,
But I have roots stretched in the earth
Growing stronger since my birth.
"You'll never touch them, for you see,
They are the deepest part of me."

IT'S ALL RIGHT BECAUSE GRACE IS SUFFICIENT.

Most of us spend our lives doing. We get an education, raise a family, and establish a career. We become pastors, lawyers, physicians, teachers, and CEOs. We accumulate a little here and there, and try to take control of an unpredictable future. We work hard to be safe and secure. All along there are forces acting upon us that are beyond us, which determine life for us. That's why we can never be saved by works.

We must be saved by grace. Grace is the unmerited, unconditional, unending love of God. Grace is pardon for sin and peace for tomorrow. Grace means you don't have to get it all right in order for it to be all right. Grace means you don't have to have all the answers in order to live the questions. Grace means it can be all right even when it is all wrong.

Let me perfectly clear. Grace is not magic. Grace does not whisk us off into some fantasy land or Disney world. Grace does not cure all our cancers, turn all our kids into model children, nor guarantee a life of happiness and success. In fact, grace most often shows up when we are weak, feeling weary, wondering if we are worth anything. There in the depth of our weariness grace comes to remind us that even when we are weak, God is strong.

IT'S ALL RIGHT BECAUSE HOPE IS ETERNAL.

The last five chapters of Daniel are full of dreams – dreams of great conflict between the Medes and the Persians, the Babylonians and the Greeks; dreams of Antiochus trampling over the temple of Jerusalem erecting a temple to Zeus where once the faithful prayed to Yahweh. The destruction was brutal. The suffering was intense, but when it had all been said and done, Daniel came forth with a vision that the Lord Omnipotent would reign forever and ever. It is that same vision which John captures in Revelation to give hope for the world.

Parker Palmer says every life is lived toward a horizon, a distant vision of what lies ahead. The quality of our action depends heavily on whether that horizon is dark with death or full of life. We do not dwell in the land of the living on the way to the land of the dying. We dwell in the land of the dying on the way to the land of the living. Hope is more than wishful thinking. Hope is more than a positive attitude. Hope is the sure and certain conviction that we who die go forth to live. It is confidence that the same power which raised Jesus from the dead will give us new life as well.

It has been nearly 30 years ago now since I met Carolyn. She was sitting in the back of the Sanctuary after service, weeping. As I listened to her story, she had good reason to cry. On Tuesday of that week, her doctor told her she had cancer. On Friday of that week, her husband told her he could not deal with it. So, he packed his bags and left her and four teenage children. On Sunday, she felt the need to come to church, even though she had never been in that Sanctuary before. The rest as they say is history. A church community surrounded her. People pitched in with the kids. I listened to her struggle for authentic faith. Months passed, and one day Carolyn popped in my office in a clown suit and sang me this song:

There is a power that lives in me,
That grants me peace and sets me free.
And when my feeble life is over,

I'll plant my feet upon the floor,
And send my spirit forth to soar.

It's all right. God is able. Grace is sufficient. Hope is eternal.