

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – July 6, 2008

“Daniel: Godly Citizenship”

Preacher: Candidate Stephen DeMik

Text: Daniel 6.1-24

Goal: That the hearers, as God’s children, recognize their role both in His creation and as citizens of our earthly nation.

Reading the story of Daniel and the lion’s den, we can see how Daniel was really in a tough situation. At the king’s decree, he was arrested and sent into a den of lions. Early the next morning, after stone was removed from the door of the den, there was Daniel—safe and sound. This is one of those bible stories that we’re all very familiar with—one taught along with Joseph and his multi-colored coat, Jonah and the whale, David and Goliath, and even Noah and the ark. But we have to ask ourselves—how did David end up in that den, full of lions? How does anyone deserve that kind of cruel and unusual punishment?

Other than being thrown into a den of lions, Daniel actually had a pretty good life. He spent years living in the royal palace, serving as the dream interpreter for King Nebuchadnezzar and King Belshazzar. When we catch up to Daniel in today’s reading, we find out that Daniel has quickly ascended up the promotion ladder, now serving as one of three presidents under King Darius. Daniel served his King and his kingdom with grace and honor. As the first president under King Darius, he just made the best moves for the kingdom. He was a great representative for the people.

The other presidents saw the writing on the wall—when Darius’ time was over, Daniel was going to take over the kingdom. Unless they would step in to stop it, they would be left in the dust. They would just have to figure out how to destroy Daniel. The problem for them was just this: Daniel didn’t do anything wrong. He made ethical decisions, ruled justly, and served his king faithfully. But like our politicians today, this didn’t stop them. Through their jealousy, they plotted together against Daniel. Like our politicians today, they basically ran a smear campaign against him. After a bit of searching, they found something in Daniel’s life that didn’t work at all in Darius’ kingdom—his faith in God. I’m not sure that they cared much about his faith at all; this was just the key to destroy Daniel.

This story isn’t all that far off from contemporary situations today. In this, an election year, we’re hearing a lot about both candidates—some good, and some bad. John McCain and Barack Obama have said that want to run a ‘clean’ campaign, but let’s be honest—we’re only in July. Most of the heavy campaigning just about to begin. And in today’s politics, nothing seems to be held back. We see public attacks on previous decision-making and platforms that each candidate has supported in the past. But truthfully, people change. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I’ve changed quite a bit in the last 17 years since we joined St. John’s. Can you imagine that same little 4th grader is about to become a pastor? Growing up, my brother Jonathan never liked dogs—in fact, even when we had dogs over the years, I don’t think he ever fed, walked, or bathed either of them. Now, just a few years later, he has two dogs. People change, and so do their thoughts and concerns. In campaigns today, we also hear disrespectful words spoken against not only the candidate, but of their wives and children. A few years ago, the Bush twins were in the news because of their late-night shenanigans. Today we’re hearing talk against Mrs. Obama.

These types of attacks are similar to the ones against Daniel—nothing at all is held back. Even when you are serving your people faithfully; even when you are making the best decisions, people will become jealous. They’ll attack your weaknesses first. If they don’t find anything there, then they’ll attack your personality...or your record...or your family. Nothing is held back—not even your faith in God.

Daniel’s strong faith sent him to the lion’s den. Even when sent to his death, he didn’t waver. He didn’t scream or plead for his life. Even though he was being sent to his death, he didn’t denounce his faith in God. Sent into the lion’s den, his earthly citizenship was to come to an end. He walked into certain death yet walked out into newness of life. Daniel, a servant of King Darius and a servant of God,

had been protected from the lions. Although working for a King who did not believe in God, Daniel was given an opportunity to demonstrate his Lord's almighty power. Daniel's faith wasn't something that he tried to hide, and it wasn't something that people didn't know about him. His faith in God was who he was—he was a child of God. His earthly citizenship had been preserved because of his godly citizenship.

How does your place as a child of God; how does your godly citizenship change your life? We'd like to say that we're just like Daniel—that we are the blameless and respected leader; that we're the one attacked for no reason. We'd like to say that if thrown into the lion's den, we'd showcase the same faith that would deliver us from the jaws of death. This may be true, sometimes...but we still fall away. We still become like the ones who attacked Daniel. The ones who were jealous; deceitful. We're still the ones who blame others for their faults, looking at the bad instead of the good. How can we become like Daniel—like the one who marched into the den of lions without fear? How can we preserve both our earthly citizenship and our godly citizenship at the same time?

Like Daniel, we aren't asked to save ourselves. Just as the angel of the Lord stood in with Daniel, protecting him from the lions, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to protect us from our sinful ambitions. He was sent to save God's people. Our Savior came to earth as a child. He saw firsthand the jealousy that man has for one another. He saw firsthand the backstabbing and the betrayal that mankind was capable of. Even when faced with certain death on a cross, Jesus didn't waver. Unlike Daniel, who was protected from all harm, Jesus was not. He suffered under the sting of a whip, the piercing of the thorns above his brow. While carrying his own means of death, he endured a pain so intense that he collapsed. His hands and feet were pierced with a simple nail, and Jesus was lifted on a cross for all to see. After he died, Jesus was laid in a tomb. Unlike Daniel, who needed to have the stone removed so that he could escape, our Lord's tomb was ripped open, and the stone was pushed away. Unlike Daniel, our savior wasn't sent to protect us from one night of harm and danger—but to give us an eternal gift of salvation.

Jesus Christ came into the world not so our earthly citizenship would be extended, but so that our godly citizenship would be eternal. While our earthly lives may only be temporary, we have been given the gift of everlasting glory, sitting at our Lord's Table and eating at his feast forever. But how are we defined by our 'godly citizenship' today? Can we demonstrate our faith even when we're like Daniel, as a government worker; or Peter, as a fisherman; or Matthew, as a tax collector. How can I showcase godly citizenship in my life?

On this 4th of July weekend, we are especially mindful of our citizenship—and how important faith in God—and citizenship—was to our forefathers. During the war of 1812, Francis Scott Key was present for the battle for Ft. McHenry in our nearby Baltimore, MD Harbor. Inspired by the sights and sounds of war, and seeing the American flag waving in the wind, Key wrote a poem to describe the American victory at Ft. McHenry.

We are very familiar today with Francis Scott Key's poem, now our National Anthem—the Star-Spangled Banner. Although he was a lawyer, in fact a District Attorney by trade, he was also a churchman and poet. While the Star-Spangled Banner is his most famous piece, Key had other works: he published a book entitled *The Power of Literature and Its Connection with Religion* and a collection of his poems was printed after his death. Francis Scott Key's life exemplified not only one of pride and dedication to the foundation of our country, but he also shared the importance of his faith—the importance of his godly citizenship.

At this time, I would like to invite you to pick up a green hymnal there in front of you, and turn to hymn # 401—Before You, Lord We Bow. If you look in the bottom left corner of the page, you will see that this is written by the same Francis Scott Key. He had an excellent way of using the same words that we use each and every day to convey how God's grace is present in our lives. In reading verse 2, it is clear that Key was a dedicated and proud American—he believed just as we do today that we are a blessed nation; we are a blessed people. However, Key's identity as a District Attorney, as an American, was not bigger than his identity as a Christian.

Francis Scott Key, just like Daniel, knew the importance of thanking and praying to God. Thanking God for life. Thanking God for freedom. Thanking God for knowing us so well, that he sent

his son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins because he knew we aren't able to stand up to sin and temptation. Key also wanted to thank God for giving him the opportunity to live and share his faith with others—even if it was done so just by stringing a few words and stanzas together. God gave Francis Scott Key many gifts in his life—a family, a prominent role in society, protection in times of war, an incredible technique with words, and even a lasting legacy in our American history books. Even through all these gifts, the one that he cherished most was the gift of Jesus Christ. We are subject to God's law, regardless of our country of citizenship. Instead of 'America,' or United States, Key writes in stanza 4: *Earth, hear your Maker's voice, Your great Redeemer own; Believe, obey, rejoice, And worship Him alone. Cast down your pride, Your sin deplore, And bow before The Crucified.*

In many professions, it is quite clear what you 'do' for a living. Hard hats, work boots, and a tool belt identify the wearer as a construction worker. Someone wearing athletic shoes and a whistle while holding a clipboard probably means that they're some sort of coach. You may have a uniform that you wear at your place of work. You have been called to be lawyers, bankers, and engineers. Teachers, doctors, and parents. You have been called as servants in God's kingdom. In your lives you provided services to others in order that we may live a peaceful and productive life. Just as you proudly wear the uniforms of your professions, of the roles you assume in society, you can also be proud of the role God has given you through your godly citizenship. Even as our earthly citizenship comes to a close, our victorious chant may be very similar to that of Francis Scott Key. His hymn concludes: *And when in power He comes, Oh, may our native land From all its rending tombs Send forth a glorious band, A countless throng, with joy to sing To heaven's high King Salvation's song!*

Our Lord has designated us, has marked us with godly citizenship. We are marked not only by our uniforms and what we do, but we are also marked with the sign of the cross at our baptism. This is a free gift that can never be taken away, even when jealousy and immanent danger is before us. God's gift will also follow us wherever we go—whether we are here at St. John's, down in Louisiana or even on the farthest point of the earth, we are able to celebrate this gift of life and our godly citizenship with all of God's kingdom.