

Daniel 6:10-12; 16-23
Reformation Sunday
“Quiet Among Lions”

Among the Yoruba people, an ethnic group of some 52 million spread between Nigeria, Togo, and Benin, one of the most flattering ways to describe a person is to say they have much ‘itutu.’ The word denotes a particular approach to life: unhurried, composed, calm, assured, and unflappable. If a bus is late, a person of ‘itutu’ won’t shout or get in a dispute with a ticket vendor; they’ll let out a minor sigh and pull a weary smile and sit and wait. If the skies open just when they’ve laid out chairs in the garden for a party, they will - in their usual tranquil and unaffected way - simply take them all back in again. There isn’t much that should rattle a person of ‘itutu.’ Itutu doesn’t just make a person wise; it makes them attractive and cool.

If itutu was a universal cool barometer, the prophet Daniel might be in the running for the coolest guy in history. Let’s take a quick run-through of the life of Daniel to this point. The King of Babylon had come and besieged Jerusalem, and in the process, he took some prizes from the temple, along with some prized individuals. He carried back a number of Israelites who were intelligent, talented, and quick to learn and brought them back to Babylon to train them for his service.

And Daniel succeeded. Through God’s help, he ascended to one of the highest positions in the land. He had interpreted dreams and visions and was successful at all he did. But some were jealous of Daniel’s success and the fact that a young foreigner was now in charge over even them. These are the lions before the lions. They were hungry. They want to destroy Daniel. They wanted to get rid of him. So they watched him and tried to catch him slipping up at his job, but they couldn’t. They tried to find him being corrupt, but he was trustworthy in everything.

Finally, they had a scheme: if Daniel is not going to break the rules, we will have to make the rules break Daniel. **“7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. 8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”** They’ve got him now! The satraps and officials know that Daniel is a God-fearing man, and now it’s just a matter of days.

The decree comes to Daniel: if you pray to any God other than King Darius, you will be thrown into the lion’s den to be killed. And what does cool Itutu Daniel do? Does he panic? Does he get enraged and upset with Darius, saying they are out to get me? It’s not fair. Does he become enraged at the people who are doing this? Does he become beside himself, knowing that he will be placed into certain death, and make plans to flee? Not exactly. **“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.”

In the face of arrest and being torn limb from limb, Daniel did as he always did. He went home, and with his windows wide open for all to see he prayed to the Lord. Just as he always did. Daniel couldn't be bothered with this opposition and the prospect of death.

In the running for Itutu awards, we could also add someone else: Martin Luther. One particular story of his life somewhat mirrors the account of Daniel. Luther had been hard at work, dismantling by the words of the Holy Scriptures many false teachings of the Catholic Church: The sale of indulgences for the remission of sins, the pope's authority over both living and dead. He boldly proclaimed the truth of salvation by grace and faith, where the only authority for teaching could be the Word of God, not officials and councils, and definitely not works.

He was excommunicated from the Catholic Church, but then he was called to the lions' den of Worms. Where powerful officials were gathered to take care of Luther one way or the other; he could deny his teachings, or he would be declared a heretic, an outlaw, someone who could be arrested and executed. Did he rage and spit tacks at them? Did he panic and seek to flee? Was he absolutely terrified for his life? Not exactly. In a sense, Luther did as he always had done. Luther responds: *“Unless I am convinced by the Scriptures or by clear reason, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience...I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen.”*

How? How were both of these men able to stay so cool? How were they able to remain calm, composed, and assured? Well, let's go back to the word Itutu. Itutu isn't a chance gift or a personality trait that you are born with; it's a skill and a quality that is grown and strengthened by a particular view. For the Yoruba, agitation, anger, and despair flow from a mistaken idea of what we are in our own power. It's when we believe that we are more in command of our external reality that we respond to reversals and frustrations with rage. Trouble cannot be skirted, as the order of life means that hardship and trials and pain will come, and you probably won't be able to change that.

In a sense, both Daniel and Luther had Christian Itutu. God promises that not everyone will believe his Holy Word and the Gospel of Christ. Some shall be hostile to it. Some will seek to harm those who believe and preach it. In the Gospel Lesson, Christ declares: you are out among wolves who will seek to devour you. You will be attacked and hurt on account of me. You will go from city to city over and over until I return again.

But Daniel and Luther knew some other very important promises of God that dwarf those wolves and lions. He promises that sins are forgiven totally and wholly by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. It is the promise of Grace alone. He promises that we receive those blessings miraculously by God-given faith without works of our own. It is the promise of Faith alone. He promises us that everything we need to know, not want, but need, is found in his Inspired Word. It is the promise of Scripture alone.

It is because of these promises that Daniel, when faced with certain death, gave praise to God calmly, quietly, just as he always did, because he knew who was the real one in charge: the gracious, loving God, whom he knew from the Scriptures. Daniel could sit calmly in the lion's den for the night because he knew that God was in control, not him. And if God was in control, he would save him; if not, he would awaken his eyes to paradise.

Because of these promises, Luther could stand in a room full of powerful men who would decide his earthly fate to state that he would not take back what he had written because he knew what God said in his Word. Luther could speak without hesitation because he knew God was clear in his Word: salvation by grace through faith. And God would either preserve him in this life, or he would be taken to his heavenly one.

You, as a Christian, have those same lions. Some will persecute you and will oppose sound doctrine. But more importantly, you can be calm and immovable as they rage against you, the church, and the Gospel. You know your God as he has been revealed in the Scripture. A God who controls all, and nothing happens outside of that control. A God who loves you as a child of his, so much so that his own Son died to cleanse you from your sins. A God who makes salvation attainable only by faith and then gives you that faith so that it may be guaranteed. A God who, at a time sooner or later, will take to be with him in paradise for all of eternity.

This is the calm that comes to you as a Christian. There is a serenity that comes from knowing how little control we have. The one who directs our days and eternities is the God of grace. There is quiet that can only come from the knowledge that my salvation is not in my hands but the hands of a loving God who sent his son for you. There is an assurance that can only come when you know that you have everything you need to know in a single book God provided for you. There is calm that can only come from the knowledge that my paradise is secured by my God-given faith.

That is it of Christianity. That is the message of the Reformation. Come what may, the devil, the world, my sinful flesh, my God has done everything for me. My God has defeated them all. My God has given me all I need in this life and will bring me to the next. Amen.