

Resisting Babylon's Pull Today
A Message Series on the Book of Daniel
2nd Sunday of Lent
February 25, 2018
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Some years ago, musicians noted that errand boys...



...in a certain part of London all whistled out of tune as they went about their work. It was talked about and someone suggested that it was because the bells of Westminster were slightly out of tune...



...Something had gone wrong with the chimes and they were discordant. The boys did not know there was anything wrong with the peals, and quite unconsciously they had copied their pitch.

We tend to copy the people with whom we associate; we borrow thoughts from the books we read and the programs to which we listen, almost without knowing it. God has given us His Word which is the absolute pitch of life and living. God has called us to sing by it...to learn to detect the false in all of the music of the world.

What beat of the drum do we march to...what is the music that makes up the soundtrack for our lives?

George Gallup writes, *"We find there is very little difference in ethical behavior between churchgoers and those who are not active religiously...The levels of lying, cheating, and stealing are remarkable similar in both groups. Eight out of ten Americans consider themselves Christians, Gallup said, yet only about half of them could identify the person who gave the Sermon on the Mount, and fewer still could recall five of the Ten Commandments. Only two in ten said they would be willing to suffer for their faith."*

Charles Swindoll writes, *"The world system is committed to at least four major objectives, which I can summarize in four words: fortune, fame, power, pleasure. First and foremost: Fortune, money...The world system is driven by money; it feeds on materialism. Second: Fame...That is another word for popularity. Fame is the longing to be known, to be somebody in someone else's eyes. Third: Power...This is having influence, maintaining control over individuals or groups or companies or whatever. It is the desire to manipulate and maneuver others to do something for one's own benefit. Fourth: Pleasure...At its basic level, pleasure has to do with fulfilling one's sensual desires. It's the same mindset that's behind the slogan: 'If it feels good, do it.'"*

Have we allowed the objectives of the world...fortune, fame, power, pleasure...to drive us? Are we allowing the world to infiltrate our lives...to enter our thoughts...to influence our morals?

The world is a great temptation in our lives...fighting against that temptation, which at times is so subtle and cunning, is a great battle.

Even Jesus fought this temptation...Following the baptism of Christ, He was driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit...in the wilderness Jesus was tempted by the devil...



...the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world...and the devil states that these kingdoms are his to give...

The kingdoms of this world are at odds with the Christian life...with Jesus Christ and all He taught and died for...the Bible is clear that we are temporary residents to this world...we are foreigners living here...The writer of Hebrews speaks of those of the faith who have gone on before us.

Hebrews 11:13 states, *“All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.”*

I love the Message translation of this passage from Hebrews...

“Each one of these people of faith died not yet having in hand what was promised, but still believing. How did they do it? They saw it way off in the distance, waved their greeting, and accepted the fact that they were transients in this world. People who live this way make it plain that they are looking for their true home. If they were homesick for the old country, they could have gone back any time they wanted. But they were after a far better country than that—heaven country.”

-Hebrews 11:13 (Message)

As “foreigners and nomads” here on earth we are told in God’s Word to be watchful, careful, to resist the powers of this world that would draw us away from our faith.

I Peter 2:11 states, ***“Dear friends, I warn you as ‘temporary residents and foreigners’ to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.”***

Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, ***“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”***

What a battle we face...a war that tears at us, wears us down, pulls at us every day. But we are not the first to fight in this war...to fight this battle.

Daniel fought it...and Daniel fought well...

Remember last week we spoke of Belshazzar and the writing on the wall. The very night Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall and Belshazzar made him 3rd in the Babylonian kingdom, Belshazzar was killed when Darius the Mede invaded Babylon with his armies. Today’s story picks up as Darius takes control of the kingdom.

Daniel 6:1-9 (NKJV) – *“Darius reorganized his kingdom. He appointed one hundred twenty governors to administer all the parts of his realm. Over them were three vice-regents, one of whom was Daniel. The governors reported to the vice-regents, who made sure that everything was in order for the king. But Daniel, brimming with spirit and intelligence, so completely outclassed the other vice-regents and governors that the king decided to put him in charge of the whole kingdom. The vice-regents and governors got together to find some old scandal or skeleton in Daniel’s life that they could use against him, but they couldn’t dig up anything. He was totally exemplary and trustworthy. They could find no evidence of negligence or misconduct. So they finally gave up and said, ‘We’re never going to find anything against this Daniel unless we can cook up something religious.’*

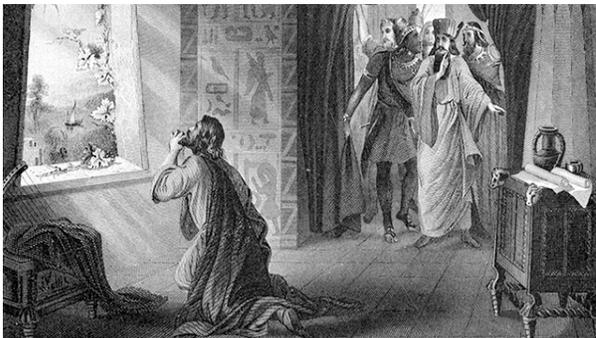
The vice-regents and governors conspired together and then went to the king and said, ‘King Darius, live forever! We’ve convened your vice-regents, governors, and all your leading officials, and have agreed that the king should issue the following decree: For the next thirty days no one is to pray to any god or mortal except you, O king. Anyone who disobeys will be thrown into the lions’ den. Issue this decree, O king, and make it unconditional, as if written in stone like all the laws of the Medes and the Persians.’ King Darius signed the decree.”

The world begins to press in on Daniel...the jealousies of the other advisors and administrators, the oppressiveness of those in power, the low morals of those who would have Daniel out of the way so that they could be lifted up...The world presses in...

Darius is tricked into making a decree that anyone who prayed to any other god or man during the next thirty days beside Darius himself should be thrown into the lion’s den. Once the decree was put into writing by Darius, it could not be repealed.

Now Daniel is no stranger to the ways of the world...He has fought them before...decades earlier when he was first brought to Babylon he refused to eat the food from the king’s table...food that according to his Jewish faith was unclean...He had refused to bow down before the golden statue of King Nebuchadnezzar and risked being thrown into the fiery furnace with his friends...Daniel had faced the world of Babylon head-on on many occasions, not allowing it to compromise his faith.

Daniel 6:10 (NKJV) – ***“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.”***



Daniel continues his battle with the world of Babylon...a world full of people grabbing for power...a world full of over-indulgence...a world full of pride and sin...He goes to his room and continues to pray...to put God at the forefront of his life...

Daniel 6:11-17 (NKJV) – ***“Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king’s decree: ‘Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the***

den of lions?’ The king answered and said, ‘The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.’ So they answered and said before the king, ‘That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.’

And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, ‘Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed.’

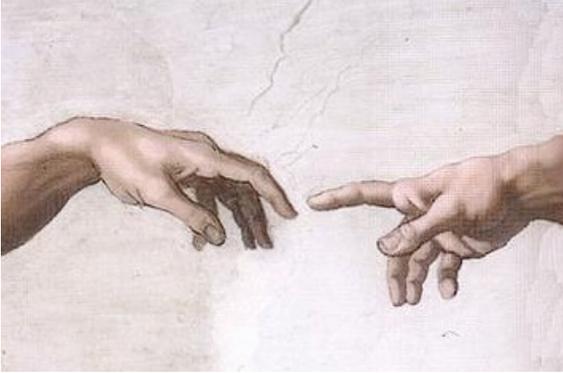
So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, ‘Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.’ Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.”



The jealous advisors get just what they want...they now have something against Daniel...the decree the King declared can not be rescinded...Daniel must be thrown into the lion's den...

Babylon is not so much a physical place but as Daniel shows...Babylon is much more...it is a state of mind... We live in a world that is very much a Babylon...a society that emphasizes fortune, fame, power and pleasure. A world that is forcing itself, imprinting itself upon our image...to the point that many of us cannot separate the image of the world from the self-image we now see in the mirror.

The Bible says that we have been created in the image of Christ...



...we bear God's image...yet, others often cannot tell us apart from the world.

Are we allowing the world or God to create our image?



The world's pull is strong...our minds are filled with the beliefs and opinions of CNN & Fox News instead of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Facebook is surfed instead of the scriptures. Television often encourages a very different set of values than our Savior taught. As many as 5,000 advertisements a day tell us that we cannot live without things of this world, that our next purchase will fill the void within. Personally, I struggle everyday battling the world's pull.

On our own strength, we cannot help but to lose the battle...our eyes will stray...our thoughts will wander...our minds will rationalize...our feet will not stand firm...and the images and influences of this world will continue to infiltrate our lives, our homes, our families, and our thoughts.

Alone it is impossible to fight the world...it surrounds us...we are immersed in it...but with God all things are possible...

In the Gospel of Mark 9:22-23, Jesus is brought a young boy filled with evil spirits, who would foam at the mouth and grind his teeth...Jesus was told that the disciples could not remove the demon...the father spoke to Jesus saying, "*The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can.*"

Do you hear what the father said? The father said, "*Have mercy on us and help us...IF YOU CAN.*"

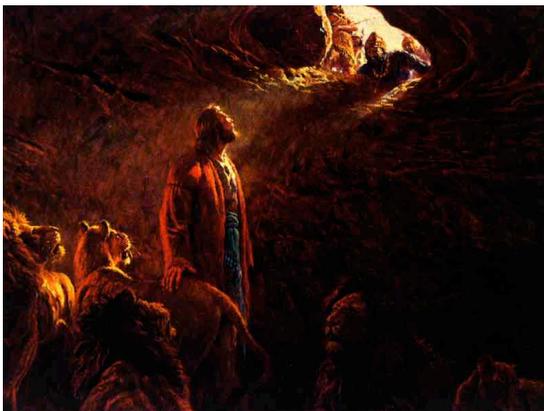
Jesus replied, “*What do you mean, ‘If I can’?*” Jesus asked. “*Anything is possible if a person believes.*”

“Anything is possible if a person believes.”

Daniel 6:19-24 (NKJV) – “*Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?’*

Then Daniel said to the king, ‘O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.’

Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God. And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den.



Look at Daniel...he was resolved in his life to not be pulled into the world...to not allow the world to come between him and his faith...to keep his focus on God and not allow the world to lead him away, causing him to sin and forget the One who loved him so much...And in standing firm in his faith...What message did he send? What influence did he have?

Daniel 6:25-28 (NKJV) – “*Then King Darius wrote: ‘To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.*

*For He is the living God,
And steadfast forever;*

*His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed,
And His dominion shall endure to the end.
He delivers and rescues,
And He works signs and wonders
In heaven and on earth,
Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.'*

So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

- Who or what is influencing your life? Your home? Your children?
- Does present-day Babylon have a pull on you?
- Where is God calling you to fight the battle that Daniel fought?
- How are others coming to an understanding of God’s mighty power and love by watching you...how you act...how you speak?

Daniel fought the battle. He faced the world and all it threw at him with faith, staying focused on God. Lent is a time to recognize that we, too, are fighting the same battle. Our Babylon might look different on the outside but it is using the same weapons that have been used against humanity since the beginning of time. We must fight...fight to be different...fight to stand out...fight to put and keep God first...We must whistle a different tune...

Remember...like Daniel...we have a strength from above...we cannot do it on our own. We must rely on Him to give us the strength to fight the enemy, to allow God’s Word and His love to have more of an influence in our lives than the things of the world.

A scuba diver lives in the water but breathes the air...



...he or she takes the environment with them. We are called to do the same, living in the world but breathing in Christ.

It is time to dive in...and we need not be afraid of the lions that will stalk and confront us...Know that God will shut their mouths...