

Knowing the End Of The Movie
A Message Series on the Book of Daniel
5th Sunday of Lent
North East United Methodist Church
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In ancient Phoenician mythology a phoenix was a mythical bird with beautiful gold and red plumage.



At the end of its life-cycle the phoenix would build itself a nest of cinnamon twigs that it then ignited; both nest and bird burned fiercely and were reduced to ashes, from which a new, young phoenix arose.



The new phoenix was destined to live, usually, as long as the old one.

Isn't that the message of the Gospel? Out of the ashes, God brings new life. It is a message, God teaches us throughout the Gospels, throughout the Old Testament, throughout the prophets, and a message God shows us in the everyday. As Martin Luther wrote, *"Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime."*

Daniel knew what it was to be in the midst of the fire, to have it appear as if life had turned to ash, only to find new life come forth...His friends had experienced it as their hands were bound and they were thrown into the fiery furnace, only to be rescued, freed, even promoted...Daniel experienced it as he stood over the pit of lions and was pushed into the darkness, only to have the mouths of the lions shut...God had shown Daniel on

countless occasions that even in the darkest moments when life seemed over...God brought new life...

And God went even further with Daniel...giving him several visions...showing him that one day, creation itself...creation which had fallen into sin, fallen into chaos...creation itself would one day be redeemed...the world itself full of war, injustice, immorality, heartache, and oppression would be redeemed...that out of the ashes of a fallen world would come an eternal kingdom...

Daniel's vision actually includes four beasts...



...the first like a “lion with eagle’s wings”...the second like a “bear”...the third like “a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird.” Each of these beasts representing, according to Daniel’s own interpretation, kingdoms that would arise and rule for a time...Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece.

But it is the fourth beast and the arrival of the “ancient of days” that we look at now...

Daniel 7: 7-14 (NKJV) - “After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.”

“I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened.”

“I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.”

*“I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom the one
Which shall not be destroyed.”*



Some scholars believe this fourth beast to be Rome...some believe we are presently living in the time of the fourth beast...many believe the small horn represents the ruthless world dictator of the last days, the anti-christ...some believe it represents Greek Emperor Antiochus Epiphanes, who called himself “*God manifest*” and persecuted the Jews around 175 BC.

But what is next in Daniel’s vision is our hope...our hope against any oppressor, any destroyer, any worldly power, any evil...



The Messiah...whom God showed Daniel in his vision...the Messiah, Jesus Christ...would share this message of new life...this message of resurrection...



...Jesus would share the message, would speak Daniel's vision to us, that out of the ashes of a fallen world will arise an eternal kingdom and you...each one of us...can have a part in it...

Jesus sent this message "*loud and clear*" the day he journeyed back to Judea, to the home of Mary and Martha, the home of Lazarus, His friend. He shouted the message outside of Lazarus' tomb, foreshadowing God's shouting from heaven, moving the stone from the tomb Easter morning, bringing new life...not only to His Son...but through His Son, to all of us...



Martha runs out...and speaks half with reproach and half with a faith nothing could shake. Martha tells Jesus..."*Lord, if you had been here...my brother would not have died...why didn't you come at once...now it's too late...*" But she adds, "*Even yet...But even now...I know that God will give you whatever you ask of Him.*"

Martha then declares her belief in the life to come..."*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day...*" It is then Jesus speaks these words...that have stood the test of time...that have struck the hearts of men and women..."***I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die...***" (John 11:25-26).

Jesus then called in a loud voice, "*Lazarus, come out!*"



...The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, *"Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*

Life out of the ashes...

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die..."

Jesus wasn't speaking simply of physical death...though He showed with Lazarus that He had power over death...Jesus spoke of the death of sin...Jesus understood that sin can kill...As William Barclay writes, *"People can become so selfish that they are dead to the needs of others. They can become so insensitive that they are dead to the feelings of others. They can become so involved in petty dishonesties and the petty disloyalties of life that they are dead to honor. People can become so hopeless that they are filled with an inertia, which is spiritual death."*

But as Barclay continues, *"Jesus Christ can resurrect them. The witness of history is that he has resurrected millions and millions of people like them, and his touch has not lost its ancient power."*

Jesus was also speaking of the life to come. Jesus would open the door to eternity through His death...cleansing us through His sacrifice...so that we could come into the presence of a perfect and Holy God. Jesus would vividly show through Lazarus...and through His own death and resurrection...that death is not the end.

The last words of Edward the Confessor were...



...‘Weep not, I shall not die; and as I leave the land of the dying, I trust to see the blessings of the Lord in the land of the living.’

Out of the ashes...resurrection...This has been God’s message throughout the scriptures...God can bring resurrection, new life to each of us...



...God will redeem the world in which we move and have our being...

Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus...He spoke to God...His Father in heaven...And then Jesus had the stone rolled away...the stench must have been horrible...and Jesus spoke His word...a word of command which even death was powerless to oppose...*“Lazarus come out!”* As Charles Wesley put it...*“He speaks, and, listening to his voice, New life the dead receive.”*

And Lazarus came forth...just as countless men and women throughout the ages step forth into the light after hearing Jesus’ words...and one day the world and all its death and decay will step out of darkness into the light...*“every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.”*

Many here have experienced God’s ability to bring new life out of the ashes, to redeem that which was lost, firsthand...



... God has worked in many of your lives...has shown you a higher calling...a greater purpose...and many of you have answered...God is healing broken hearts, calming angry souls, opening closed minds, freeing past shackles, curing sick spirits, and bringing hope to so many. God is still moving stones...still raising the dead through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you turn on the news at night and feel like the world is burning, the world is in ashes...God's message to Daniel...to us...is, *"It's only temporary."* See we know how the movie ends...



Most likely, you are experiencing this fallen world we live in much closer to home...your experience is much more personal...

Perhaps you feel like your finances are in ashes..."*I am the resurrection and the life...*"

Perhaps you feel like you've been "*burned to a crisp*" by another, hurt and stepped on..."*I am the resurrection and the life...*"

Perhaps you feel like you can't change...the "*fire*" is gone...the passion has faded..."*I am the resurrection and the life...*"

Perhaps you feel your marriage, your health, your prayer life, your work...out of the ashes..."*I am the resurrection and the life...*"

Perhaps you are shouting to the heavens...like the psalmist you are shouting, "*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord...Lord, hear my voice...*"..."*I am the resurrection and the life...*"

Yes, I know...but I need help with this..."*I am the resurrection and the life....*"

Ok, but I need an answer...I'm praying...help me...where should I turn..."*I am the resurrection and the life...*"

What is the answer, Lord...what is the answer..."*I AM...*"

Jesus said to Martha, "*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who believes in me will never die.*" And then Jesus asked a question, not simply to Martha, but to all of us...down through the centuries...Jesus simply asked, "*Do you believe this?*"

We can Believe...When life is at its darkest...we can Believe...out of the ashes will come new life....We can Believe...no matter how dark the world may seem – one day all of creation will be redeemed – the kingdoms of the world will fail – the kingdom of God is eternal and we have been given a place in it as was Daniel.

Daniel ends, "***as for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you***" (Daniel 12:13).

That is God's message to us..."*go your way until the end*" – persevere..."*you will rest*" – such darkness, hard times, difficulties cannot last...will not last...not personally...not globally...for I am God...and I will have the victory..."*You will rise again to receive the inheritance...*" – out of the ashes I will give you life...This is what my Son has shown you...This is what I have shown you through the prophets...through the incarnation...through the cross...through the empty tomb...I have shown you...that you may know...that you may know how the movie ends...Believe...Believe...