

Sermon followed by Service

July 14, 2024

Dan

If you were an animal, what kind of animal would you want to be? A mighty lion, king or queen of the jungle? A golden retriever, loved by all? Maybe a hummingbird or butterfly, kissing flowers all day long? If you were an animal, what kind of animal would you want to be?

What if God were to Nebuchadnezzar you? What if God were to look into your heart and life? Not just when and where you're at your best. What if God were to look at the dark and ugly in your heart and life? And then - make you into an animal like that dark and ugly monster lurking inside? What kind of animal would you be? A mouse, a toxic, passive-aggressive mouse? A squirrel always chasing, always needing more? A snail hiding in your shell? A barking, biting mutt? I think of so many dark, ugly monsters I could be.

In our lesson, God took Nebuchadnezzar, king of one of the greatest kingdoms on earth, a bull, a bully of a man, and God gave him the heart and the life of a bull, a cow, let's say, a steer, eating grass, burping grass, sleeping in his supper.

Why? Nebuchadnezzar was a specially chosen servant of God. God raised him up, set him up, for a special purpose - to take care of his people. Now, if we were God's people back then and there, we might not think of God's purpose for Nebuchadnezzar as "taking care." One of God's first jobs for

Nebuchadnezzar was to discipline God's people, to execute God's judgment on his people. Why? For the most part, God's people couldn't be bothered to live as God's people. They were too busy living the life of the world (oh, sure, they might do a little God-thing now and then if it didn't take too much or get in the way). Again and again, God warned them, but living the life of the world was too precious to them for them to pay attention to God. So God raised up and set up Nebuchadnezzar to execute his judgment, to teach his people a lesson, to break their hold on living the life of the world, and then, to take care of his broken people. Nebuchadnezzar took hold of his work with a zeal that could shame us. In 605 BC, he crushed Judah and Jerusalem, taking Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and thousands more into captivity in Babylon. Then when Judah and Jerusalem didn't learn their lesson, he returned in 597 and again in 586; that last time destroying Jerusalem and the temple. Nebuchadnezzar took hold of his ruling, bossing, judging work, but he never really took hold of his caring work - caring for his people, caring for the hurting, caring for the squeezed and the crushed and oppressed.

Is it possible to be both an effective and a caring leader?

If not, why not?

If so, what might be some challenges?

How might you meet those challenges?

Why? Perhaps it was power; you've heard the saying - "Power corrupts, and absolute power seems to corrupt absolutely." Or perhaps it was simple selfishness, with Nebuchadnezzar too focused on caring about himself to care for the people God entrusted to him. Put the two together and what

do you get? Nebuchadnezzar out walking on his deck, looking down and around: **“Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”**

Do you ever fall into the “Nebuchadnezzar trap?”

If so, how and when?

How do you keep yourself out of the “Nebuchadnezzar trap”?

Then what? Just like that, a voice from heaven, **“This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.”** And just like that, Nebuchadnezzar was given the mind of an animal.

Just like that. But it wasn't “just like that, no warning.” Twelve months earlier God had warned Nebuchadnezzar in a dream, a dream interpreted by Daniel.

Is there a warning from God that you have been ignoring? In that dream, Nebuchadnezzar was a tree, an enormous tree providing food and shelter for all. But, as Nebuchadnezzar tells it, a watcher from heaven came and called out: **“Cut down the tree and chop off its branches, but leave the stump.”** But that's not all. **“Let him [Not “let it,” but “let him”] be**

drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.” Terrified, Nebuchadnezzar didn’t know what to think of his dream, but Daniel did. Nebuchadnezzar had good reason to be terrified. As great as Nebuchadnezzar was, God would cut him down, down and out. Not down and out dead, but down and out in the fields living like an animal with the mind of an animal. And yet God had a message of hope for Nebuchadnezzar. His stump wouldn’t be chopped up or burnt out. Instead, after seven times (we’re not told how long “seven times” is) ... after seven times, when Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God, that it is God who rules over the kingdoms, and that God gives his kingdoms to whomever he wants.... When Nebuchadnezzar would acknowledge that God rules, then Nebuchadnezzar would have his kingdom restored to him.

What comfort do we have knowing that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms?

What extra “kingdom” responsibility do we have in the United States?

On top of that, Daniel offered another message of hope: **“Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”**

Daniel knew what is dear in God's heart, what God is eager to see in the hearts and minds of his servants and leaders. Not just a cold rejection of sin - "Do what's right." Not just a cold efficiency in getting done what God wants done - "Do what it takes and get it done." No, in his servants, and in his leaders, God is looking for a heart that is kind to the poor and oppressed, that helps the weak and the needy, a heart that stands up for those pushed down and around, a heart that picks up those crushed and stepped on. Not just in ancient Babylon, but in our homes and families today, in our church and lives today - it can be so easy to get focused on the do and the to-do. But God isn't just looking for a cold rightness or a cold efficiency, God wants his servants and his leaders to be shaped and moved and filled with kindness.

Sure, Nebuchadnezzar was making Babylon great again, but God was looking for something different, something more - God was looking for his people to be cared for again.

Nebuchadnezzar was warned, but he didn't pay attention, like Judah and Jerusalem had been warned, but didn't pay attention. And now we have been warned. Warned, and guided, and set free.

What is the "Daniel 4" warning for us?

What guidance and encouragement does Daniel 4 give us?

(See also 1 Peter 4:6-11.)

Set free to know the heart of God Most High. He rules and sets up his rulers here in this world. So many are like

Nebuchadnezzar more interested in ruling their way than God's way, more interested in getting done what they want done than what God wants done, more interested in their idea of great than God's idea of great. But God has set up another King, his Son, a King he can count on to think his way, to rule his way with love and kindness because, as God's Son, he has God's heart.

You know how he rules. He didn't just walk his deck: "Look what I've done"; He humbled himself. Even though he was by nature God, better than all of us in every way that matters, he emptied himself, took on our nature, and became a servant. He didn't just eat and drink and sleep with the animals, he humbled himself to eat and sleep, to live and die with us, as us. Even though he was perfect and right, godly in every way, he humbled himself to eat and sleep, to live and die with the ungodly, with sinners. But not just with the ungodly and sinners, he humbled himself to be judged to be ungodly and a sinner.

What do you find most amazing about Jesus' humbling himself?

What does that mean for us? (*Consider examples from your own life.*)

- All those times we lived the life of the world, joining the world in their sin ...
- All those times we bossed and bullied to get our way, to make ourselves great ...
- All those times we bossed and bullied for God, thinking we were doing God's thing and making God's kingdom great ...

- All those times we pretended our wants and ways were God's wants and ways ...
- All those times we pretended we were doing God's thing, when we were really just looking out for ourselves, doing our own thing ...
- All those times we shamed God's glory by forgetting to care, making ourselves too busy to care, turning the other way, so we wouldn't have to care ...

For all those times, God's judgment could be: "You wanted to live the life of the world? Join your king in hell." But our King doesn't just sit in judgment. Instead, for all those times, for you and for me, he stood in for us on the cross - the king for his subjects, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God. There on the cross, he took our place; he paid the price for our self-centered lives and ministry, he paid the price for our wrong-headed ministry, he paid the price for our missing ministry.

Now - with Easter life, with Easter power - he sits at God's right hand, not just judging and ruling, but speaking up for you as forgiven and right, as God's royal priesthood, as precious to God for life with him. Now Jesus sits at God's right hand, not just judging and ruling, commanding and demanding - but inviting: **"Come to me all you who are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest."** Not just judging and ruling, commanding and demanding - but promising: "I'm here for you; I've got you; I'll make life right for you."

That's right, some day, instead of making us to be what's worst in our hearts, he will make us to be what's best in his heart - saints filled with the love of God, living and ruling with him in heaven.

How did Jesus show that it is not only possible but blessed to lead with kindness and grace?

And what does that mean for us? A whole new way of living today - a life of serving God by serving the people he loves, a life of serving God by serving the world he came to save. Amen.

What do the leadership styles of Nebuchadnezzar and Jesus Christ mean for you?

July 13 & 14, 2024

NEW MORNING PRAISE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are surrounded by so many different leadership styles - some wonderful and effective, some ineffectual, some plainly evil. At the same time, leaders around us can have so many different goals - some wonderful and serving, some simply necessary, some wrong-headed and wrong-hearted, and some evil (whether recognized as evil or not).

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... our Lord teaches some lessons on leadership and serving - may he forgive, and may he bless!

OPENING HYMN

"God Is Here! As We Your People"

Hymn 858

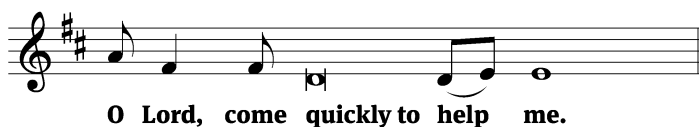
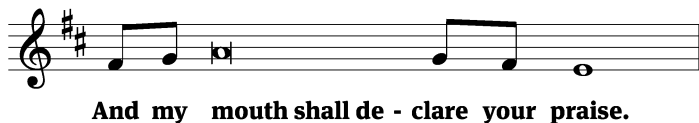
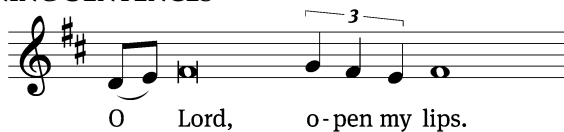
God is here! As we your people meet to offer praise and prayer,
may we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts
wait the coming of the Spirit into open minds and hearts.

Here are symbols to remind us of our lifelong need of grace.
Here are table, font, and pulpit; here the cross has central place.
Here, in honesty of preaching, here, in silence as in speech,
here, in newness and renewal, God the Spirit comes to each.

Here our children find a welcome in the Shepherd's flock and fold;
here, as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us as of old.
Here the servants of the Servant seek in worship to explore
what it means in daily living to believe and to adore.

Lord of all, of Church and kingdom, in an age of change and doubt,
keep us faithful to the gospel; help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication, all we have to give, receive;
we who cannot live without you, we adore you! We believe!

OPENING SENTENCES



CONFESSION & ABSOLUTION OF SINS

M: We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.

C: Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.

M: God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will.

C: Amen.

Give glory to God, our light and our life.

Come, O come, let us wor - ship.

COME, O COME, LET US SING TO THE LORD

Come, O come, let us sing to the Lord,
 let us shout with joy to our sav - ing Rock;
 come, en - ter in with our songs of praise,
 come, en - ter in with thanks - giv - ing.

1 You are a great and a won - drous God,
 2 Come, let us wor - ship and, bow - ing low,
 cup - ping in your hands all the depths of earth.
 kneel be - fore the One who has made us all.

You made the hills and the moun - tains high,
 You are the God whom we call our own,

Refrain

you made the seas and the dry land.
 we are the flock that you shep - herd.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift of grace that we come into your presence and offer true and faithful service. Grant that our worship on earth may always be pleasing to you, and in the life to come give us the fulfillment of what you have promised; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Daniel 4 (Select verses)

King Nebuchadnezzar,

To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth:

May you prosper greatly!

It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

How great are his signs,

how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;

his dominion endures from generation to generation.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. ...

[Daniel] answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds— Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

“Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.’

“This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion;
his kingdom endures from generation to generation.
All the peoples of the earth
are regarded as nothing.
He does as he pleases
with the powers of heaven
and the peoples of the earth.
No one can hold back his hand
or say to him: "What have you done?"

At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN (LAST PAGE OF SERVICE FOLDER) *"In Hopelessness and Near Despair"*
CWS 738

SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 9:19–23

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION*Mark 10:45*

Alleluia! "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Alleluia!

GOSPEL*Mark 10:35–45*

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN*"Not unto Us"***Hymn 582**

Not unto us, not unto us be glory, Lord;
not unto us but to your name be praise;
not unto us but to your name all honor be giv'n
for matchless mercy, forgiveness, and grace.

Amazing grace—that chose us ere the worlds were made;
amazing grace—that sent your Son to save;
amazing grace—that robed us in your righteousness
and taught our lips to sing glory and praise.

O faithful love—that shepherded through faithless years;
forgiving love—that led us to your truth;
unyielding love—that would not let us turn from you
but sent us forth to speak pardon and peace.

Not unto us but to your name be glory, Lord,
for grace so rich, so wide, so high, so free.
Abide with us till trav'ling days are over and done,
and pilgrim feet lead us home, Lord, to you.

SERMON

Daniel 4

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Congregation President | Steve Lemerand |
| Secretary | Charles Ledvina* |
| Outreach Elder | Nic Holter |
| Youth Ministry Elder | Paul Massey* |
| Worship Elder | Tim Kalter |
| Adult Ministry Elder | / |
| Congregation Treasurer | Jim Thies |
| School Board Chairman | Joe Lofsness |
| School Finance | Lee Rockwell* |
| School Recruitment | Peter Kolch |
| Parent Relations | / |

* Elected to a new term

HYMN

“Dear Lord, to Your True Servants Give”

Hymn 896 vs. 1 & 3

Dear Lord, to your true servants give the grace to you alone to live.
Set free from sin to serve you, Lord, they go to share your living Word,
the gospel message to proclaim that all may know your saving name.

When all their labor seems in vain, revive their sinking hopes again;
and when success crowns what they do,
O keep them humble, Lord, and true
until before your judgment seat they lay their trophies at your feet.

PRAYER AND LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

M: O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to this new day. Defend us with your mighty power, and grant that this day we neither fall into sin nor run into any kind of danger; and in all we do, direct us to what is right in your sight, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. **Amen.**

BLESSING



The Lord bless and keep you.



A - men.



The Lord's face ev - er shine up - on you.



A - men.



The Lord grant you peace for all your days.



A - men.

CLOSING HYMN

“Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way”

Hymn 737

Lord, help us walk your servant way wherever love may lead
and, bending low, forgetting self, each serve the other’s need.

You came to earth, O Christ, as Lord, but pow’r you laid aside.
You lived your years in servanthood, in lowliness you died.

No golden scepter but a towel you place within the hands
of those who seek to follow you and live by your commands.

You bid us bend our human pride nor count ourselves above
the lowest place, the meanest task that waits the gift of love.

Lord, help us walk your servant way wherever love may lead
and, bending low, forgetting self, each serve the other’s need

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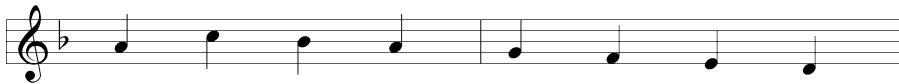
1 In hope - less - ness and near de - spair, I
 2 I see my heart's con - di - tion now, My
 3 I trem - ble as I feel your hand, Ex -
 4 For - giv - en, free of guilt and shame, Grant



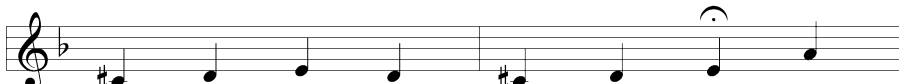
cry to you, my Sav - ior! My guilt is more than
 heart's di - verse af - fec - tions. Why do I love the
 pec - ting re - tri - bu - tion, Yet hear no curse or
 me some time to ren - der A gift to glo - ri -



I can bear. I have not earned your fav - or. You
 things you loathe; I'm torn in two di - rec - tions: Now
 re - pri - mand, But grace and ab - so - lu - tion: With
 fy your name, Love to re - flect your splen - dor: This



know me as I real - ly am: How
 prod - i - gal, now Phar - i - see. O
 you there is for - give - ness, Lord, You
 world must know what I have learned, That



much is truth, how much is sham; Why
 God, be mer - ci - ful to me; Who
 speak the sweet, con - sol - ing Word, And
 you be - stow what none has earned: The



should you heed my plead - ing?
 else but you can help me?
 I am sure you love me!
 joy of full for - give - ness!