

WELCOME AND NOTICES

- Church meeting after the service

CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast your troubles upon the Eternal; His care is unceasing! He will not allow his righteous to be shaken. (The Voice)

OPENING PRAYER

Dear Father, Quieten our minds, still our hearts, for your living ways are all we seek
Strengthen our lives, inspire our spirits, in your living waters flows endless grace.
Amen.

SONG/HYMNS

Give thanks to the Lord our God and King

Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King
His love endures forever
For He is good, He is above all things
His love endures forever

Sing praise, sing praise

With a mighty hand and outstretched arm
His love endures forever
For the life that's been reborn
His love endures forever

Sing praise, sing praise
Sing praise, sing praise

Forever, God is faithful
Forever, God is strong
Forever, God is with us
Forever

From the rising to the setting sun
His love endures forever
And by the grace of God, we will carry on
His love endures forever

Sing praise, sing praise
Sing praise, sing praise, yeah

Forever, God is faithful
Forever, God is strong
Forever, God is with us
Forever, forever

Forever, God is faithful
Forever, God is strong
Forever, God is with us
Forever

Sing praise, sing praise
Sing praise, sing praise
Oh, sing praise, sing praise
Sing praise, sing praise

Forever, God is faithful
Forever, God is strong
Forever, God is with us
Forever, yes You are

Forever, You are faithful (forever, You are faithful)
Forever, You are strong (forever, You are strong)
Forever, You are with us
Forever, forever

I will bless the Lord forever

I will bless the Lord forever
And I will trust Him at all times
He has delivered me from all fear
And He has set my feet upon a rock

I will not be moved, and I'll say of the Lord
You are my shield, my strength, my portion
Deliverer, my shelter, strong tower
My very present help in time of need

Whom have I in heaven but You
There's none I desire beside You

For You have made me glad, and I'll say of
the Lord

You are my shield, my strength, my
portion
Deliverer, my shelter, strong tower
My very present help

You are my shield, my strength, my
portion
Deliverer, my shelter, strong tower
My very present help in time of need
You have made me glad, and I'll say of the
Lord

You are my shield, my strength, my
portion
Deliverer, my shelter, strong tower
My very present help

You are my shield, my strength, my
portion
Deliverer, my shelter, strong tower
My very present help in time of need

My very present help in time of need
My very present help in time of need

Purify my heart

Purify my heart
Let me be as gold and precious silver
Purify my heart
Let me be as gold, pure gold

Refiner's fire,
My heart's one desire
Is to be holy
Set apart for You, Lord
I choose to be holy
Set apart for You, my Master
Ready to do Your will

Purify my heart
Cleanse me from within
And make me holy

Purify my heart
Cleanse me from my sin, deep within

Refiner's fire
My heart's one desire
Is to be holy
Set apart for You, Lord
I choose to be holy
Set apart for You, my Master
Ready to do Your will

Refiner's fire
My heart's one desire
Is to be holy
Set apart for You, Lord
I choose to be holy
Set apart for You, my Master
Ready to do Your will

CONFESSIOIN

Compassion and forgiveness belong to the
Lord our God, though we have rebelled
against him. Let us then renounce our
wilfulness and seek his mercy by
confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

**Heavenly Father, you have loved us with
an everlasting love, but we have gone
our own way, and rejected your will for
our lives. We are sorry for our sins and
turn away from them. For the sake of
your Son who died for us, forgive us,
cleanse us, and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for
you, and to please you in every way;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ
gave himself for us to redeem us from all
wickedness and to purify for himself are
people that are his very own, eager to do
what is good.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!
Amen.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

God of all goodness and grace, receive the gifts we offer and grant that our whole life may give you glory and praise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

READING: Daniel 1: 1 – 21

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. 5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

6 Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favour and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they

entered the king's service. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

21 And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

SONG/HYMN

Guide me O thou great Jehovah
Guide me, O my great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty;
hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
where the healing waters flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
ever be my strength and shield,
ever be my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever sing to you,
I will ever sing to you.

PRAYER FOR MARK AND OURSELVES

Heavenly Father, you have guided your servant Mark through his preparation that he will have the message you need us to hear this morning, give us faith to receive

your word, understanding to know what it means, and the will to put it into practice, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

REFLECTION:

A testing time - Daniel 1:1-21

Do you remember the students in China who took a stand against the army in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the brutal way in which the students protesters were massacred? Students have often taken a stand against corrupt or brutal governments. They have a passion for justice and the courage to stand up to injustice. We have in this passage of scripture today four students who took a stand against a regime that had destroyed their country and capital, and had taken the brightest and best into exile along with the sacred articles from the temple of Yahweh, Israel's God.

We begin a new series for winter in the run up to Lent. It is called 'Making sense of the times.' In every age people try and make sense of their time, and we are no different in that respect. The times we are living in have thrown so much of what we have known into disarray, and I don't just mean what has happened because of covid. Our culture has changed enormously in the past half century, and particularly since the turn of the millennium. We live in testing times, which is why I felt we should take a look at the book of Daniel.

The year was 587BC and the Babylonian empire ruled the region. The first half of the book of Daniel tells the story about the Jews in Babylonian exile, the temptations they face and the demands of living in a foreign land as immigrants who

were looked down on by a hostile superpower. The question is whether or not they could remain faithful to their faith in this context. The stories tell of the pressure they were put under and the expectations of their rulers to learn Babylonian ways and culture. How could they keep faith with the God of Israel in such a place, and how could they show that their God was still in control despite their circumstances?

They accepted pagan education and careers in a pagan institution

So here in this passage we have four young men, possibly only teenagers at the time, but from the royal family and nobility (v3), who it seems have been fast-tracked into the Babylonian civil service. The Babylonian ruler, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken these fine young men to train them for three years in the ways of Babylonian culture, literature and language. These were the best of Judah's young men who were now to be Babylonian special advisors. How would they get on in their training? Would they remain faithful to the God of Israel or would they buckle and serve the Babylonian gods? They accepted a pagan education and careers in a pagan institution that had destroyed their home, their city and their temple. In fact v21 says 'Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.' In other words he saw out the Babylonian empire and saw in the new Persian empire.

They accepted new pagan names – linked with identity

As well as accepting a pagan education and careers in a pagan institution, the four young men accepted pagan names.

Ashpenaz, the chief court official in Babylon, decided to give Daniel and his three friends new Babylonian names. They had had Hebrew names which connected them to the God of Israel. New names sought to give them a new identity. Now Daniel and his friends didn't attempt to get out of Babylonian education or get out of having Babylonian names. Rather they did what Jeremiah had exhorted them to do in his letter, when he wrote, "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:7).

They didn't accept royal food

However, although Daniel and his friends took the foreign names and learned the foreign ways, they took a stand when it came to the royal food and decided not to eat the choice food and wine reserved for them. Why do this? Surely this was the lesser of the assimilation issues they were faced with. It's possibly that taking food from the king's table signified covenant loyalty to the king. As we know from the breaking of bread, it's a covenant meal we are eating. So, Daniel and his friends were willing to serve in the Babylonian court but weren't willing to bow the knee and swear allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, something we will see later on in the book of Daniel. Such covenant loyalty was reserved for God alone. This is probably why they took a stand with the food and turned vegan and ate only vegetables and drank only water (v12). They were confident that God's presence would be with them enable them to flourish, and so it proved for 'they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food' (v15).

We see in the conclusion of this passage this passage that God honours the faithfulness of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah by causing them to be favoured by the king as the four friends passed their exams with flying colours. 'In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom' (v20). The reason for this is that 'To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds' (v17).

What can we learn from this passage?

Well, some may look at this and say that a vegan diet will always produce better nutritional results. But that is not the point of this passage. Neither is the passage simply saying be brave or stand up for God and you'll pass your exams. It's saying remain faithful to the only true God, remain faithful to the covenant relationship we have with him through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Like Daniel, our citizenship is also somewhere else other than where we are – our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Whereas Daniel and his three friends were compelled to serve a foreign kingdom, we as disciples of the Lord Jesus are impelled to serve God's kingdom in an unbelieving world, called to make disciples of all nations.

In this passage we also learn that we too need the wisdom and discernment of the Holy Spirit to see where we are we in danger of assimilating with the culture of our day. Are we remaining distinctive as Christians in an ever-increasingly secular

world or are we just like everyone else? Being distinctive doesn't mean being odd. We can be distinctive in quiet ways, like Daniel. Daniel didn't announce to everyone that he had a change of diet, but worked in such a way that no one knew. Being distinctive could be done in the small everyday things of life, such as not telling lies, but being seen as people of integrity. We need to be vigilant against being sucked into things that give ultimate covenant allegiance to anything or anyone other than our God.

Finally, the narrator puts things in God's perspective. In v2 it says 'And the LORD delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand', that is into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. In v9 it says 'Now God had caused the official to show favour and sympathy to Daniel.' And in v17 it declares, 'To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.' God delivered, God caused, God gave. In Hebrew it is the same word for each situation. What this says is that it was God who is in ultimate control. He was behind Judah's exile as a punishment for breaking their covenant relationship. It was God who caused Daniel and his friends to be favoured, and God who gave them knowledge and learning. In other words, whatever we are going through God is in ultimate control and therefore should command our ultimate trust.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Almighty God, we praise you for your creation, and all you richly provide. Enable us to live in such a way that your majesty and mercy are seen by all.

Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All governments rule under your authority. May they work for the good of those they rule, seeking your justice and peace in every law and action.
Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Enable those who are engaged in industry and commerce, the media and education, sport and the arts, to fulfil their responsibilities with integrity and an attitude of service.
Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Comfort and strengthen those who are gripped by poverty, weakened by illness, or oppressed by cruelty. May they know your love and experience your care.
Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Inspire your church here on earth to proclaim the gospel of your love through the death and resurrection of your Son. May all people hear the call to put their faith in you.
Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Help your people to display your compassion to all those in need. May the poor and the lost of this world find in you their true wealth and sure destiny.
Refresh and equip us, O God, to be your faithful and obedient people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Lord I come before your throne of grace

Lord, I come before Your throne of grace;
I find rest in Your presence
And fulness of joy.
In worship and wonder
I behold Your face,
Singing what a faithful God have I.

What a faithful God have I,
What a faithful God.
What a faithful God have I,
Faithful in every way.

Lord of mercy, You have heard my cry;
Through the storm You're the beacon,
My song in the night.
In the shelter of Your wings,
Hear my heart's reply,
Singing what a faithful God have I.

Lord all sovereign, granting peace from heaven,
Let me comfort those who suffer
With the comfort You have given.
I will tell of Your great love for as long as I live,
Singing what a faithful God have I.

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.