



WELCOME AND NOTICES

1. Lent Course booklets – please pick up
2. The film 'The Way' is being shown on Sunday 6th March, 4pm, at Church.
3. If you have been contacted about ACM reports, please get to either Alistair, Sue or myself asap.

BANNS OF MARRIAGE

CALL TO WORSHIP

'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' (Mark 10:45).

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

SONGS:

PRAISE, MY SOUL, THE KING OF HEAVEN
to His feet thy tribute bring.

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like thee His praise should sing?
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise the everlasting King!

Praise Him for His grace and favour
to our fathers in distress;
Praise Him, still the same forever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Glorious in His faithfulness.

Father-like, He tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame He knows;
In His hands He gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Widely as His mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore Him;
ye behold Him face to face;

**Sun and moon, bow down before Him,
dwellers all in time and space.**

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise with us the God of grace!

PRAISE HIM, YOU HEAVENS

and all that's above.

Praise him, you angels

and heavenly hosts.

Let the whole earth praise him.

Praise him, the sun, moon,

and bright shining stars.

Praise him, you heavens

and waters and skies.

Let the whole earth praise him.

Great in power, great in glory,

Great in mercy, King of heaven.

Great in battle, great in wonder,

Great in Zion, King over all the earth.

ALL HAIL KING JESUS

All hail Emmanuel!

King of kings, Lord of lords,

Bright Morning Star.

And throughout eternity I'll sing Your praises,

And I'll reign with You throughout eternity.

OPENING PRAYER AND CONFESSION

Lord and Father, we come rejoicing in your goodness to us in Christ, that you sent your Son to die so that we might live. How great Thou art! **How great Thou art**

We confess our sinfulness before the mercy of our Heavenly Father.

Lord, you are steadfast in your love and infinite in your mercy; you welcome sinners and invite them to be your guests. We confess our sins, trusting in you to forgive us.

We have yielded to temptation and sinned:

Lord, have mercy

Lord, have mercy

We have turned from our neighbours in their need:

Christ, have mercy

Christ, have mercy

We have resisted your Word in our hearts:

Lord, have mercy

Lord, have mercy

May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and keep us in life eternal. **Amen.**

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Gracious Lord, giver of every good gift, we offer our gifts to you, our money, our time, our talents and our love. Receive now these gifts and bless them for your kingdom's sake. **Amen.**

SUNDAY CLUB PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you were once a child and understand what it is to grow up. Bless now our children with your presence and your Word, that they may grow up knowing you more and more, for your kingdom's sake. **Amen.**

READING: Daniel 6:1-9

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom,² with three chief ministers over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss.³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the chief ministers and the satraps by his exceptional qualities

that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.⁴ At this, the chief ministers and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.⁵ Finally these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.'

⁶ So these chief ministers and satraps went as a group to the king and said: 'May King Darius live for ever!' ⁷ The royal ministers, prefects, satraps, advisors 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.'⁹ So King Darius put the decree in writing.

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

REFLECTION: MAKING SENSE OF THE TIMES (6) The witness that faced the lions

As we have been watching events unfold in Ukraine, it has made me think of this passage in Daniel 6; not the lion's den part but the fact that one kingdom had been taken over by another. The Babylonian

Empire was gone and the Persian Empire had conquered it. Daniel had seen Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar come and go. Now Darius the Mede was in charge, but Daniel is still serving the LORD God of Israel.

Daniel was one of many Jews exiled to Babylon. He rose to become one of the top three politicians in the country by the time we reach Daniel 6. He had a busy job and great responsibility. By this time Daniel had lived in Babylon many years and he played a full part in the life of the state. He was an exceptional and distinguished leader, and Darius planned to set Daniel over the whole kingdom (6:3). There are two themes in this passage which I want to explore this morning – the character of leaders, and the continuous conflict between the kingdom of light, God’s kingdom, and the kingdom of darkness.

Firstly, the character of leaders. Daniel had been promoted by Darius because of his exceptional qualities (v3) and because Darius didn’t want to suffer loss (v2). Then as now the trust in public office was used to advance personal interests, yet Darius found in Daniel a man whom he could trust, a man of distinguished character. Even when others implied that Daniel was not to be trusted because he was ‘one of the exiles from Judah’ (v13), and liable to rebel against Darius, it was clear that Darius could trust Daniel more than he could trust his own people because of his character. In the midst of corruption and professional jealousy, Daniel stood out as a man governed by a sense of loyalty and integrity that stemmed from his right relationship with God. Daniel served God continually (v16, 20), and was recognised as a servant of the living God (v20) over and above him being a servant of Darius.

We are living in times when trust in public office is at an all-time low because we have found that our leaders have compromised their integrity – from the MP’s expenses scandal to parties during lockdown, and now to Ukraine and the weakness of response to Putin’s scheming. Character matters, and we need leaders of character. This week I met with the Methodist Superintendent Minister, Rev. Andrew Burrows. In him the Methodist Circuit, which includes this church, have a man of character and trustworthiness, who is willing to take difficult decisions for the sake of God’s kingdom.

And that leads to my second theme, the clash of kingdoms – the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. On this occasion this clash has its focus on the laws of these two kingdoms. The unchangeable law of the Medes and Persians was used by unscrupulous men to attempt to overcome the laws of God’s kingdom by which the righteous are ultimately vindicated. It says in v21-22, ‘Daniel answered, “O King, live for ever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.”’ We discover that kingdoms may make their laws but they are all subject to the law of God’s kingdom. President Putin may consider that, playing the long game over many years, he has outwitted the western leaders and for a second time made a land grab of parts of Ukraine. But he will not have the final say. Neither will President Zelensky of Ukraine or President Biden of the USA. The LORD will have the final say. What we need to pray for is for people like Daniel, people of integrity and trust,

to be raised up in these countries, and also in our own country.

Leaders can be easily duped, as in the case of Putin who has duped other leaders, and in the case of Darius, who was duped by his own leaders, the governors and satraps (v4-9). The powers of darkness tried to wear Daniel down by wave after wave of attacks on his faithfulness to God. By this point in Daniel's life he was probably around 70-80 years old. The new law about not praying other than to Darius was a temptation to Darius' ego and a way of finally overcoming Daniel. This whole story about Daniel's continuous prayer three times a day and being thrown into the lion's den is a sober reminder that whatever age we are there will be temptations to compromise our faith. These temptations are never isolated incidents in our spiritual life but part of a larger strategy of Satan against us.

Next week we enter the season of Lent, a season that begins by remembering the temptations in the wilderness, of Jesus being tempted to compromise and so fall at the first hurdle. We should not mistake a single battle for the whole war. We may overcome Satan at one point, but we should not relax thinking that the assaults are over. If we let our guard down, that's when the enemy comes in like a flood (Isaiah 59:19). Daniel's greatest test came at the end of his life, not at the beginning. In the same way Jesus' greatest test was not the temptations in the wilderness but the cross.

If we take this passage as an example of the kingdom of darkness trying to overcome the kingdom of light, it's important for us to remember that one of the chief functions of temptation from God's perspective is to strengthen us. As

we successfully resist the devil and his schemes to derail us in our following Christ, we are enabled to meet even greater tests in the future. However, many Bible characters stumbled and fell, yet even in these God used the process of restoration to equip and strengthen his people. So, if you're sitting there thinking "Well, I've already failed", then remember Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and a whole list of people who failed and got up again to serve the living God. Satan tries to wear us down. That was his tactic with Daniel, but like Daniel, we should not be taken by surprise.

The importance of character, and the clash of kingdoms. When we are tempted to compromise on our faith, when we think that everything seems to be going wrong, it is time to trust in God, put our faith into action. Are there public practices that are incompatible with your commitment to Christ? Before Daniel faced the actual lions he faced the lions of corrupt colleagues and the temptation to compromise. What lions are you facing that have the power to make you turn from following Christ? Family members who don't believe, work colleagues who would rather see the back of you, health problems that seem to chip away at your faith? Remember Daniel and whatever you are facing this week, be a person of character who prays, and trust that God's kingdom shall prevail, just as God prevailed in saving Daniel.

Let's pray.

INTERCESSIONS

Lord Jesus, we confess you as our Lord, and we choose to take up our cross and follow you. Help us in our sufferings and trials and strengthen us in our weakness.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We pray for those who are following you in difficult parts of the world. We pray for Christians persecuted for their faith, that the testimony of their lives may be a witness to their persecutors.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We pray for the powerless and all victims of injustice and cruelty, for those in war zones and places of famine, and for refugees and asylum seekers, that justice and peace may be theirs. We especially remember today the people of Ukraine.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We pray for the powerful and influential, and for all who govern the nations. Give them wisdom from above and care for the people they are called to serve. We pray for President Putin, that you may bring a prophet into his midst, as you did for David with Nathan, that he may hear your word.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We pray for the world in which we live, which has been ravaged by our greed and carelessness. Give us the wisdom to truly care for the world you have placed us within, its waters and wildlife, its wildernesses and urban places.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We pray for the afflicted and sorrowful and for all who need our prayers. We pray for all in need of care. We remember

before you those who have passed from this life into the light and peace of your presence, and we pray for those who mourn, that they would find comfort in you.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

And all these things we pray, along with all our prayers throughout this week, in the name of Jesus our suffering Lord.
Amen.

SONG:

HE IS EXALTED

The King is exalted on high,

I will praise Him.

He is exalted,

Forever exalted

And I will praise His name!

He is the Lord,

Forever His truth shall reign.

Heaven and earth

Rejoice in His holy name.

He is exalted,

The King is exalted on high!



HOLY COMMUNION (Methodist)

In Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood which was shed on the cross.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.



The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Blessing and praise belong to you, gracious and eternal God. Through your living Word you created all things, the majesty of the heavens and the glory of the earth. In your wisdom and goodness you have made all people in your image and likeness.

Therefore with saints and angels and with all creation we lift up our voices to proclaim the glory of your name:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of Your glory,
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of
the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy and gracious God, we give you thanks and praise that in the fulness of time you gave your only Son to share our human nature and to be tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin; to set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem and to be lifted high upon the cross, that he might draw to all creation to himself. When the hour of his glory came, and loving his own until the end, he sat with them at supper, took bread and, after giving thanks to you, he broke it and gave it his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup after supper, saying, 'Drink from this, all of you;

this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

**Dying, you destroyed our death.
Rising, you restored our life.
Lord Jesus, come in glory.**

In obedience to his command we recall his suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension, and we look for his coming in glory. Send your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

In union with Christ's offering for us, we offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice. Unite us in love and peace with all your people until, with the whole company of heaven, we are brought into the presence of your eternal glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Through him, with him, and in him, in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and
glory are yours, almighty Father, now
and for ever. 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.**

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.



Christ is the Bread of Life.

The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

Christ is the true vine.

THE SHARING OF THE BREAD AND WINE

Receive this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ and feed on the Lamb of God with reverence and faith.

The body of Christ broken for you. **Amen.**
The blood of Christ shed for you. **Amen.**

Gracious God, we thank you that you have nourished us with the bread of life and with the cup of salvation. May we who have received this sacrament be strengthened in your service; we who have sung your praises live in your glory; and we who have known of your love see you face to face in your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG:

CROWN HIM WITH MANY CROWNS

**The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark, how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy chosen/matchless
King
Through all eternity.**

**Crown Him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave
And rose victorious in the strife,
for those he came to save
His glories now we sing,
who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.**

Crown him the Lord of love,

**behold his hands and side,
those wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified;
no angel in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends his burning eye
at mysteries so bright.**

**Crown him the Lord of years,
The potentate of time,
Creator of the rolling spheres,
Ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For Thou hast died for me;
Thy praise shall never, never fail
Throughout eternity.**

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

The God of all grace who has called you to eternal glory in Christ, make you perfect, confirming and strengthening you; and to him be the power for ever and ever. **Amen.**

And the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, bless you and keep you, now and always. **Amen.**

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