

October 4, 2020    New Beginnings Pt. 3    Daniel 2:17-23

This past week we have seen the level of upset that occurs in a nation's psyche when the leader is suddenly diagnosed to be ill with Covid-19. The Stock Market went frantic early Friday morning. Every News channel in Canada talked about 2 things: murders in Toronto and the potential fallout of the news concerning the American President and the 1st Lady being diagnosed as Positive with the virus. There were a flurry of news updates on the succession plan should the President become incapacitated.

Well, it was not a virus that caused frantic things to occur in ancient Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, it suddenly becomes apparent, has not been sleeping well. The peace he should have received in bed, seeking sleep and rest has become tormented by the repetition of a dream that troubled him. It was early in his period of ruling, his 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his reign. The royal mind, soul, and body are affected by the lack of sleep. Nebuchadnezzar summons magicians, enchanter, sorcerers, and astrologers. They must have thought the king has lost his mind. He does not simply demand that these professionals explain what the dream means, his trust level of them and their ilk is so low, he demands that first of all they must tell him what he saw in the troubling nightmare. The astrologers argue with the King to tell them what he saw in the dream. And it is the astrologers who argue the King is asking the impossible. They say, "there is not a man on earth who can do what the King asks." (Daniel 2:10) Nebuchadnezzar stands firm. In fact the King

says if they fail to perform, they will die, chopped to pieces. And the royal death order is issued.

Daniel's wisdom is shown in the fact that he intercedes on their behalf. He finds out why the execution order has been given and he succeeds in getting an interview with Nebuchadnezzar. He asks for time to prepare to meet the challenge the King has laid out. Daniel is a Jewish exile. He receives a brief amount of time. He is on a short leash. And failure will mean death of the Babylonian "wise men" and the Jewish exiles. For Daniel and his friends, and for Nebuchadnezzar, whether he knows it or not, this is a new beginning.

Back in his own quarters, this is the first thing Daniel does. He summons his friends, fellow Jewish exiles, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and he asks them to pray. He asks them to pray to the Lord God Almighty for mercy, that their lives might be spared by solving this mystery, and during the night, in a vision Daniel sees what Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed about. There is a reason that we pray and ask our friends to band together with us in prayer in times of crisis. The Babylonian wise men including the astrologers got it right. No mere man is going to be able to do what Nebuchadnezzar had asked. The challenge is impossible for mere human beings to meet. What Daniel did, was not just an act of faith, but the definition of faithfulness. He takes it to the Lord God in prayer. He marshals his friends to pray with him and for him. Why? Because with God, nothing is impossible.

And most of what I read to you from Daniel chapter 2 is Daniel's praise of God for the answers that have been given which will result in the sparing of many lives. Including the lives of magicians, sorcerers and astrologers, people with whom Daniel has little in common. And as Daniel praises God he really does not know or understand all the implications of what is occurring in the midst of this experience of new beginnings. Daniel recognizes on his knees that real power is not the kind of power Nebuchadnezzar has...to chop people to pieces and demand the deaths of advisors that cannot advise. God has wisdom and power. He changes the seasons.

This very week we all experienced the change of the season. Barbara and I basked in the sunshine and enjoyed a glass of wine on the deck at our home in Belleville in the sunshine. And then as the calendar changed to October it became apparent with the rain and the cooling off, and the change in colour of the leaves, and the leaves falling to the ground...it is no longer summer. Summer is over. And even though we may get a couple of warmer days it is now officially Fall. Autumn leaves, Autumn skies, cold Autumn rain. And these things are not in the realm of human control. The Lord God Almighty changes the times, and HE changes the seasons. He sets up Kings and HE deposes them. Beware, those who think they have power on earth and will continue to have power. The mighty rise and the mighty are brought to heel by the will of God. Daniel recognized where the real power lies.

Daniel also recognized where real wisdom comes from. We like to think that wisdom is the result of age. And there is a measure of truth in that. I continue to think of the line put in the mouth of a young Clint Eastwood, playing a homicide detective. "Man's got to know his limitations." As we age we tend to recognize that there are limits to what we can do. But Daniel recognized real wisdom comes from God. That is why this book of books, the Bible is so important to us. It continually reminds us that God is sovereign. And it reminds us that God reveals things to men and women and young people too, that they will never learn in a classroom. God "reveals deep and hidden things! He knows what lies in the darkness. Light dwells with the Lord God Almighty." (Daniel 2:22)

It is revealed to Daniel by God Himself what Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed. He saw a terrifying statue which boils down to this: kingdoms wax and wane. They rise and they fall. They come and they go. What terrified Nebuchadnezzar was the revelation to him by God in a dream that he is not going to live forever, and no matter how powerful he thinks he is, his time will pass. Other empires will rise and they too will fall. Mortality is a piece of the fabric of life. It affects civilization. New beginnings are important because the old passes away, what was,... ceases to be. Even the Church of Jesus Christ has to recognize that reality. The Church goes on and on...but only if we have the faithful wisdom to change.

Daniel the Jewish exile, became a key man in the administration of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Why? Because God was with Daniel and with his prayerful friends who were also exiles. Which is another way of saying, they were faithful enough to realize their limitations. Their need for God and what God might by grace reveal to them. There are lessons here for us as we cope with Covid-19 and this time of plague. We need to be praying for those who are working to create a vaccine. We need to observe the rules for living in a time of plague...washing hands, socially distancing, isolating to the degree we can, wearing masks to protect ourselves and others from contagion. Out of such humble efforts new beginnings arise. Praising God for HIS grace in what are difficult times. 2020 is a definition of difficult times. Sickness and death. Things beyond our control and beyond our ability to understand. Daniel leaned on God and not his own understanding. Wise and faithful. Lessons for us in a time of new beginnings.

Let us pray;

Lord our God we bow before you in a time where we are humbled by what we do not understand and what we cannot do. Grant us the wisdom of faithfulness. Bless the researchers who seek to find a medical answer to the plague of Covid-19. As for us, Lord we thank you for your saving mercy. We pray that in the midst of this second wave you would be with us that we might do well in your sight. Help us to continue to care for others. In Jesus name we pray. Amen