

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, July 19, 2026

Friends, as we come to our time of scripture, I invite you to join me in prayer. Let us pray. Holy and gracious God, thank you for gathering us here for the work of your spirit that brought us to this moment. Center us as we gather. Still the chaos of our minds and open our hearts and our ears that we might hear your words of promise and hope that speak out across the centuries and still guide our day to day life. Amen.

I'm going to be honest with you guys. When David came to me and we talked about the idea of a summer sermon series, Tell Me a Story, I was very excited about it and still am very excited about it. And yet when he began assigning texts and I realized that I had Daniel, I got a little trepidacious. I really hope my Old Testament professors at seminary are not tuned in somehow right now, but I learned more about Daniel from Veggie Tales than I did from any class I took. I cannot say that I have read the book of Daniel before this week. So, I did a lot of research and background, some of which I'm going to share with you guys today before we head into the text. The book of Daniel takes place during the Babylonian exile. So, the people of Israel, including Daniel, are in Babylon, but it was written much later than that and superimposes a story back on a particular time, as is kind of common with some of our Hebrew texts. It's also a book in two parts. The first six chapters are narratives about Daniel and Daniel's colleagues in the Babylonian court. The second six chapters, 7-12, are apocalyptic visions of God's restoration. Now, these two parts of the book, I discovered this week, were written in two different languages, which is incredibly uncommon actually in our scriptures. The court narratives were written in Aramaic in the oldest texts that we have while the apocalyptic visions were written in Hebrew in the oldest texts that we have. So this is a complicated book that I didn't know anything about before this week. And, yet, we find ourselves this morning in chapter 6, right at the cusp of the division between the two parts of Daniel, picking up the story where Daniel is one of the most important advisors and rulers for King Darius there in Babylon. So picking up with Daniel chapter 6, verse 6, let us hear these words from God.

So the administrators and the satraps conspired and came to the king and said to him, "Oh King Darius, live forever." All the administrators of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict. And whoever prays to any god or human for 30 days except to you, O King, shall be thrown into the den of lions. Now, O King, establish this interdict and sign the document so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians which cannot be revoked. Therefore, King Darius signed the document and the interdict. Although Daniel knew the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to God and to praise God, just as he had done previously. Then those men watched and found Daniel

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, July 19, 2026

praying and seeking mercy before God. And they approached the king and said, "Oh King, did you not sign an interdict that anyone who prays to any god or human within 30 days except you, O King, shall be thrown into the den of lions?" The king answered, "These things stand fast according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then the men responded to the king, "Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, King, or to the interdict you have signed, but he continues saying his prayers three times a day." When the king heard the charge, he was very much distressed. He was determined to save Daniel, and until the sun went down, he made every effort to rescue him. Then the conspirators came to the king and said to him, "Know, O King, that it is the law of the Medes and the Persians that no interdict or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed." Then the king gave the command, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, "May your God whom you faithfully serve deliver you." A stone was wrought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring, and with the signet ring of his lords, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No entertainment was brought to him, and sleep fled from him. Then at dawn, the king got up, and at first light hurried to the den of lions. When he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out anxiously, "Oh Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?" Daniel then said to the king, "Oh King, live forever. My God sent an angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me because I was found blameless before him. and also before you, oh King. I have done no wrong." Then King Darius was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. When Daniel was taken up, no kind of harm was found on him because he had trusted in his God. The king gave a command and those who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the lions' den themselves, they, their children and their wives. Before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones into pieces. Then King Darius wrote to all peoples and nations of every language throughout the whole world, "May you have abundant prosperity. I make a decree that in all my royal dominion, people shall tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. God delivers and rescues. God works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. God has saved Daniel from the power of the lions." So Daniel thus prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Friends, these are the words of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now, on its surface, this is the same kind of story that we have heard before as we have spent some time in our Hebrew scriptures this summer. It's a story of court intrigue that we heard in the Joseph narrative and last week when Pastor David helped us reflect upon Esther. It is a story of

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, July 19, 2026

the contest between the powers of the world and the powers of the Almighty. Our story takes place in a very structured storytelling. A chiasmus is what they call it. It's that bad things happen to a point, and then all of those bad things are reversed. So Daniel is really good at something. A satrap is a provisional governor of a region of Persia; and he, a foreigner, over the course of his life had risen to prominence as one of King Darius's trusted governors. So, he, a foreigner, is really good at something. His enemies plot. The king makes a decree. Daniel is arrested. And you can kind of hear the dun dun dunh. The next morning, Daniel is saved. And then the pattern repeats itself in the positive. The king makes a decree. The enemies are destroyed. Daniel is again confirmed as the best governor in the region.

Daniel's act of choosing to continue to pray was an act of civil disobedience, an act of resistance. And thus, Daniel and the king are trapped by their choices. Daniel has no other choice that he is willing to make than to continue to pray to God. And the king's choices have trapped him to a point that he cannot rescue Daniel even though our text tells us exactly how hard he tried and how torn up he was about the situation. We see again reflected human faithfulness matched by divine faithfulness. In fact, human faithfulness exceeded by divine faithfulness. Because Daniel was faithful and without blame and thrown into the lion's den, God stilled the mouths of the lions and Daniel emerged. Daniel emerged unblemished.

It's another story we tell where the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Ruth, and Esther, and Deborah, is victorious. Victorious to the point that even King Darius sees it. He declares, "God's dominion has no end, enduring forever."

Now this is an important story in the book of Daniel, in particular in the place that it holds, as I shared earlier, between the earlier stories of courtly life and the stories of the apocalyptic visions that maintain the rest of the book of Daniel. It tells a story that sets the stage for a God of hope, a God that can be trusted in times of stress and danger. It's a reminder of who God is before the verses come that wrestle with how the world is breaking and God will be restoring the world. It's a story of the promised victory of God that just as the God of Israel saves Daniel, God will save all of God's people.

Now, as we've spent time in the stories this summer, I have tried to focus on two things in my reflections on the texts. First is what do the stories tell us about God? And second is, of course, what do they tell us about ourselves? So the Daniel text is a reminder that God's ways are not our ways. It is indeed framed as a battle of the powers, the powers of the world that try to rule one way and the powers of God, the almighty creator of heaven and earth. It's another illustration in our scriptures that all of the human claim to strength and power eventually yields before the

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, July 19, 2026

strength and might of the Almighty. Now maybe not in our time but in God's time. That's not an excuse for us. It was not an excuse for Daniel. It is a factor of us living into the 'already, not yet' of God being present with us. We know that there is a promised future, and we know that we live in a world that is not yet there.

The text from Daniel is also a powerful reminder that it's untrue when we tell ourselves that something cannot be stopped or changed. Whether human action like wars and police actions or human laws like those that perpetrate hate and separation. Even the laws of the Medes and the Persians, which the text spends so much time talking about, falter in the face of the almighty God.

So, what does the story about Daniel teach us about Daniel?

I was fascinated this week by reflecting on the fact that Daniel just goes about his everyday life. He doesn't—he knows that something dangerous is going to happen—and he doesn't go about acting like a religious zealot or a martyr. He doesn't stand in the street and proclaim his faith. He doesn't wave banners or start a fight. He simply continues his daily normal practice. He doesn't amp anything up or change anything. He makes a decision to continue living faithfully, continue living his life as before out in the open. He doesn't even bother to close the blinds or be a little bit discreet about continuing to worship God after the interdict from King Darius. He continues to pray, turning toward Jerusalem, as the text tells us. Now, that phrase is important—the turning toward Jerusalem. It's more than just a specific location, particularly during the Babylonian exile and in the continuing diaspora of the Jews. Jerusalem is the promise of the future. If you've ever been to a Passover seder or a Yom Kippur service with any of your Jewish friends, you'll know that they end both of those services saying, "Next year in Jerusalem." It is a reminder of the promised restoration of the people and of the world. As Daniel continued to pray, he trusted in the hope of God's future. Not a naive hope, but a hope that risked everything. A hope that risked being destroyed. By living his life faithfully people and systems were changed. King Darius ends in a declaration of praise of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Daniel. The God whose dominion knows no end. The God who rescues and restores. The living God.

It's often hard for me to reflect upon stories that seem miraculous in our texts because it's easy to get focused on what exactly happened that God stilled the lions' mouths so that Daniel wasn't hurt. How do we explain that? What does that mean? But the more time I spent with this text this week, the more it occurred to me that what is miraculous is what God can do with faithful lives. A central theme of our sermon series this summer has been that God is at work in and through humans, fallible humans, often humans that we least expect, often people just like you and me.

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, July 19, 2026

Too often when the world feels out of control, it feels like we either ring our hands in despair that nothing can be done and it's not worth trying, or we default to believing that we have to fix it all. We have to take the grand actions that are going to restore the world to the way that God wants it to be. The story of Daniel reminds us that it is not our job to save anyone. Our calling is to live every day as if we believe the hope and the confidence we claim in the Almighty God. To do good even when others laugh. to be honest and kind even when it makes us vulnerable. To give people the best of us even when they disparage us.

Daniel's story reminded me this week that while the world rages around us, filling all of our senses with hatred and disgust and anger and bile and distrust, it is a powerful act of resistance to live as Christ teaches us to live, to speak with graciousness and kindness to the people who are waiting on us or are checking us out in the grocery store. It is an act of resistance to care for others the way Christ tells us to. It is an act of resistance, friends, to reject the way the world tells us it is acceptable to behave and to turn again and again to the ways of Christ.

When despair and destruction seem to be all around us, permeating all of our lives, we, like Daniel, trust in the immutable power of the Almighty God who works and yearns for justice, peace, and mercy.

So friends, our story about Daniel is a story about living faithful lives. the ordinary everyday seemingly small things. To love our neighbor. To treat people with respect. To help when we see someone suffering. To share what we have. To look out for those with no support systems. to trust in the hope and the promise of the Almighty God who is indeed making all things new. When we live faithful lives, we live as beacons to those who see us praying, living, and loving as God demands, and they are able to see the work of the Lord through us. And by the grace of God, lives and systems may indeed be changed.

May it be so, friends, this day and every day. Amen.