**Hebrew Bible Sermon Manuscript: Daniel 12:1-3 (due Nov 1)**

**THE TEXT**

“At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:1-3, NRSV)

**INTRODUCTION**

Our text today considers a question that these days may be all too real. With the economy in free-fall, rising unemployment, untampered racial discrimination amidst a woefully mismanaged global pandemic. All these realities are enough to leave us with little, if any hope, and so the question we are left with is: How do we speak of hope when we’re struggling to feel hopeful? Or courage when there seems to be no end to suffering in sight? Or faithfulness when we find ourselves trapped in a cycle of violence, bearing witness to the actions of an empire that seems intent on crushing the-least-of-these, and when there is a very real possibility that the faithful may not survive? Daniel 12:1-3 faces these questions and fears head-on by speaking of a “time of anguish” that has not yet been seen. Yet, even within that dire reality that Daniel faced, this text also speaks of God’s presence and liberation, formulating perhaps one of the first Old Testament references to something that sounds an awful lot like the possibility of resurrection. Divine and everlasting life, emerging from a situation of inhuman death-dealing.

**TENSION IN THE TEXT**

To set the scene a little bit. The stories found in the Book of Daniel are set right after Babylon’s first attack on Jerusalem, where they had plundered the city and the temple, and taken a wave of Israelites into exile. Among them were four men, Daniel and his three friends, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego. The book of Daniel tells of their struggles to maintain their faith, hope and courage in the land of their conquerors. Despite all the pressure to compromise and to capitulate to the privileges of Babylonian imperial power, the stories of “Daniel and the Lion’s Den,” and “Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego and the Fiery Furnace” were all meant to inspire strength and courage to remain steadfast and faithful. How can God’s people speak of hope while in exile? Be like Daniel and his friends.

To understand the full meaning of our passage today, however, we have to back track a little to chapter 9, where we find Daniel confused as to *when* God would finally come and free the Israelites, ending their suffering. So, he consults the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah, where God said that Israel’s exile would only last 70 years. For Daniel, the 70 years is almost up and so he asked God to fulfill his promise soon, but an angel comes and informs him that Israel’s sin and rebellion has continued and so their time of exile and oppression would be prolonged, becoming seven times longer than Jeremiah envisioned. Daniel is deeply disturbed by this extension to his people’s suffering under the oppressive powers of the Babylonian empire. Deeply disturbed.

**THE TENSION IN THE PRESENT**

And we should be too. We should be deeply disturbed at any notion that another person’s suffering may be lengthened, for any reason. Are we not deeply disturbed when the suffering of…

* the poor persists in the midst of one of the most affluent societies in history, but one that so-often measures a human’s worth by their ability to consume and produce.

Are we not deeply disturbed when the suffering of…

* women, young and old, remain underpaid and overworked, sexually harassed and exploited, then judged incapable of making decisions that affect their own bodies.

Are we not deeply disturbed when the suffering of…

* black and brown people in this country continue as legacies to the horrors of slavery and Jim Crow.

Are we not deeply disturbed when the suffering of…

* LGBTQ+ individuals persists, perhaps most strongly within the walls of the church, where their identities have been endlessly demonized and judged as deviant.

Are we not deeply disturbed when the suffering of…

* Muslim and Jewish believers has increased so that many have installed metal detectors and security guards in their places of worship, in order to protect themselves from armed intrusion.

Are we not deeply disturbed when the suffering of…

* others is finally rendered visible to us, and
* we finally mourn the ways oppression has been made invisible because of privilege.
* Are we not deeply disturbed when our own privileges are revealed to us, and we realize the ways in which we have participated, willingly or unwillingly, in systems of oppression?

For those of us with the privilege of white skin, of wealth, of straightness or maleness the experiences of prolonged and deep suffering may not yet be visible to you…But, when they become visible they ought to deeply disturb you. And the question remains, how do we speak about hope, when we are deeply disturbed, and facing prolonged anguish, just as Daniel was. How do the faithful talk about hope, when they face the the prospect of having to wait ever longer for liberation to come.

**THE HOPE IN THE TEXT**

And then, as Daniel reckons with the prospect of continued suffering in exile, he has one final vision: where the rule of the Babylonian, Persian and Greek kingdoms is sequenced, leading up to a final king from the north who invades Jerusalem, sets up idols in the temple, and exalts himself far above God, *but then* all of a sudden comes to ruin. While there has been endless debate about who exactly these kings are, one thing is clear, Daniel’s final vision means to address his deep concern for his people, the people of God, who continue to suffer. This vision tells us, in no uncertain terms, that humans who claim god-like power for themselves *are* beasts and will only exploit and prolong human suffering in their desire for domination. **But** deliverance will come, and when it does it will be a divine deliverance bringing an end to oppressive and exploitative power. It will vindicate and even resurrect those who have suffered.

So, returning to the question: How do we speak of hope? Or courage? Or faithfulness amidst suffering? The book of Daniel, and chapter 12:1-3 specifically, suggest that if we are to speak of hope, it must come from the deep conviction that what we see and experience isn’t the full picture. Hope isn’t found in any human - no matter how powerful they seem, or how far their reach. Hope of deliverance, of relief, of healing and justice is not found in human systems, or structures or theologies. Instead, hope is found in a God who, though unseen, takes the side of the oppressed; who hears their cries and plans for their deliverance. Suffering and anguish though capable of bringing about death - Death, for those who are faithful, does not have the final word. The God who takes sides, uncovers and unmasks the systems and structures of domination, in us and in the world around us, and brings them to ruin. The God who takes sides, is a God that resurrects the faithful to new and everlasting life.

This is precisely why Jesus used imagery from Daniel to describe the oppressive leaders he confronted in Jerusalem. Even though he knew his resistance would lead to his execution at the hands of the Roman empire, his death would not be the final word. This is why John the visionary who wrote the Revelation could adapt Daniel’s visions and apply them to Rome of his day and also to all future oppressive empires. And so the point of Daniel is that all generations of readers can find here a pattern and a promise, a pattern that human beings and their kingdoms inevitably become violent beasts when they glorify their own power, and don’t acknowledge the almighty power of a God who sides with the poor and oppressed. And hope resides in the promise that one day God will confront the beast, and rescue the world and the faithful by bringing the Kin-dom to rule over all nations.

**THE HOPE IN THE PRESENT**

And so, for every generation this book speaks a message of hope that ought to motivate us to faithful, and even radical discipleship. Our few verses are a direct assault, on not just the Babylonian empire, or the Persian, or even the Greek…but on every empire, and on every structure of human power that diminishes life. For although we may find ourselves struggling in our search of hope amidst all that has gone on this year…be assured, God has taken a side and God will intervene.

And when God does intervene, there will be clash with political and economic systems that benefit from peddling lies and deceit to the poor, in order to push exploitative policies that only benefit the richest of the rich.

When God intervenes, and God will, there will be a laying bare of the injustices perpetuated in our religious institutions, who have remained silent at best and complicit at worst in homophobic and transphobic abuses and prejudices.

And when God intervenes, and God will, there will be a reckoning for all those who have called themselves Christian, and yet have thrown their lot in with the beastly empires of our day.

God will intervene, and when God does, the hope of resurrection will be reserved for the faithful. Verse 3, “those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” God intended for God’s chosen people to live in stark contrast to the world around them. To live like Daniel and his friends, even while in exile and facing the threat of death, believing in the God that can bring life to those whom the oppressor has crushed.

**CONCLUSION**

For us now, in 2020, the day before a general election, still suffering the effect of a global pandemic, how might you speak of hope? Where does your hope rest, today? Might it be in living a life in defiance of all the powers of death? Might it be in becoming engaged in the work of unmasking, naming, and engaging powers and principalities?

After all, Are we not a, people inaugurated and commissioned by the life, death and *resurrection* of Jesus? And is it not in this *resurrection hope* that we find a clear declaration that deliverance is found in God, not just at the end of all things, but within human history as well? God’s kin-dom, which breaks into our world here and now, has life-giving power which is able to dismantle all the forms of death. Go now, finding hope in God’s resurrection power, that infuses the people of God to bring life and hope to all those who suffer.