

There are a couple of things going on for us this morning. It's Thanksgiving weekend and in spite of our ongoing struggle, we pause to give thanks. Gratitude in the face of struggle and suffering is an expression of faithfulness...our own faithfulness and a recognition of God's faithfulness. And listing things we're grateful for can actually make us more grateful even when we don't feel grateful at all.

Today is also the first Sunday in Advent. To some extent, we started hitting the themes of Advent when we started working our way through the prophets a few weeks ago. The prophets persistently point to God's faithfulness and encourage us to trust God, no matter what else is going on.

Before we start sharing gratitude, I want to say just a couple of things about Daniel.

This story – Daniel in the lion's den – is probably relatively familiar. Darius is a Persian king. The Persians defeated Babylon. The Persians inherited the Jewish exiles when they conquered Babylon.

Daniel and his three friends are Jewish exiles. They are apparently gifted young men and the king is using them for his personal service.

It's actually a little hard to make the historical timeline jive in the Daniel story. Darius was king after the exile ended and Cyrus, the first Persian king who ruled over Babylon, sent the exiles home. Maybe some of the exiles were kept around for what they could contribute to the Persian king's court.

On the other hand, the biblical authors are less concerned about historical timelines than they are about the God revealed in the stories. Sometimes with the great stories in the Bible you have to lay history aside a little and focus on what the story is saying about God.

Later on in the book, Daniel has a series of visions. They are similar to the visions from the book of Revelation...in fact some of them strikingly similar. They serve the same purpose that they do in Revelation – they depict the forces of evil in a battle with God...and assure us that God wins.

One of Daniel's visions shows a powerful divine figure coming from the clouds. This figure is called "one like a human being." This figure, also called the son of man, becomes the one through whom evil is defeated. When Jesus later referred to himself as the son of man, it becomes clear that Jesus is this divine figure who comes from heaven as a human being to bring victory over evil.

But now, let's go back to the lion's den and our focus on gratitude. God saved Daniel in the lion's den. He's still not out of the woods. He's still a captive. Yet he sees that God has been faithful.

Sometimes gratitude flows easily...things are great...everything we touch turns to gold...health and well-being abound.

Other times, gratitude is an expression of faithfulness. Daniel doesn't know what's next. The kings who have so far ruled over him and his friends seem to be fickle, jealous, and violent.

But for right now, Daniel has been saved. Sometimes gratitude comes from being able to say, lots of things aren't right, but this moment, here are the things God has done and here are the things for which I'm grateful.

That's kind of where we are. We're sick of the pandemic...we're sick of the political climate...we're seeing even more starkly than ever before where the cracks in our society are and we're maybe a little fearful about what's next.

Yet this weekend we pause to express gratitude.

So we'll open it up to hear the things for which you are grateful.

[Gratitude sharing – go to YouTube link to hear -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziDpLQQRyVl>]