DANIEL 6:10–12, 16–23. (EHV)

> Now, when Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house. It had windows on its upper story that opened toward Jerusalem. Three times each day he would get on his knees and pray and offer praise before his God. He continued to do that, just as he had been doing before this. Then these men came as a group and found Daniel praying and seeking favor from his God. They then went and asked the king about the decree. "Your Majesty, did you not sign a decree that anyone who prays to any god or person for thirty days except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the den of lions?" The king answered, "Indeed I did. The order is established as a law of the Medes and the Persians that cannot be revoked." … Then the king gave the order, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you." A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the pit. The king sealed it with his signet ring and the signet rings of his nobles so that nothing could be changed with regard to Daniel's situation. Then the king went to his palace. He spent the night without food, and no entertainment was brought before him. But he could not sleep. At dawn the king arose as soon as it was light and hurried to the lions' den. As he came near the pit, he cried out in a fearful voice. The king said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, was your God, whom you serve continually, able to rescue you from the lions?" Then Daniel spoke with the king. "Your Majesty, may you live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the mouth of the lions. They have not hurt me because he found me innocent in his presence. Also before you, Your Majesty, I have committed no crime." Then the king was very glad and said that Daniel should be brought up from the pit. So Daniel was brought up from the pit, and he was unharmed because he trusted in his God.

Daniel was a young man from Judah when he was exiled to Babylon in 605 BC. After a few years, he was made the leader of the wise men of Babylon up until the fall of the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC more than sixty years later, when Darius the Mede took over Babylon. Darius the Mede seems to have been his original name, but he is apparently the same man who would become known as Cyrus the Great, who ushered in the era of the Persian Empire.

Now when Darius came to power, he kept Daniel on his staff as one of three supervisors over his satraps or provincial governors. Daniel so distinguished himself in this position that Darius was planning to promote him and put him in charge of the entire kingdom. But the other supervisors and satraps were jealous of him and wanted to take him down. However, they weren't going to be able to find any evidence of corruption in his governance, because he was a man of integrity. Since they knew his integrity stemmed from his faith, they realized that they were going to have to use his faith against him if they were going to take him down.

So they approached the king and appealed to his ego: "Darius, Your Majesty, may you live forever! All the supervisors of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the advisors and the governors advise the king to establish and enforce a decree that prohibits anyone to pray a prayer to any god or person for thirty days except to you, Your Majesty. Anyone who does so will be thrown into the den of lions. Now Your Majesty, please establish the decree and sign a document

that cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians that cannot be revoked."

The ploy worked and the king signed the decree.

The men trying to take Daniel down then went to find Daniel, because they knew how he would respond. And they weren't wrong. "Now, when Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house. It had windows on its upper story that opened toward Jerusalem. Three times each day he would get on his knees and pray and offer praise before his God. He continued to do that, just as he had been doing before this." When you truly believe something, you put it into practice. Daniel could have told himself, "This praying-to-the-king is only for thirty days. I can just take a break from openly praying to the Lord for thirty days and pretend to pray to the king for thirty days, and after that I can go back to my regular routine." But doing that would have been giving a false testimony about God and would have compromised what he believed and knew to be true. So he kept his usual prayer routine.

And the men found him doing so, and went and reported what they found to the king. "Didn't you sign a decree, Your Majesty?"

"Yes, I did, and it cannot be revoked."

"Okay, well, Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, is disobeying you and praying his usual prayers."

The king didn't want to lose Daniel, so he worked hard to rescue him that entire day. Daniel certainly would have a chance to lie about what the men found or at least apologize and tell the king he would change his ways. The king would have been all too happy to give Daniel a second chance. But Daniel held firm, and the men kept putting pressure on the king and pointing to the decree he had signed. So finally the king gave the order to have Daniel thrown into the lions' pit.

We don't hear about Daniel kicking and screaming on the way. He seems to have had the same attitude that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had decades earlier, when they were facing the prospect of being thrown into the fiery furnace: If I believe in the true God, then he can rescue me if he wants to, but even if he chooses not to rescue me from earthly danger, he will still watch over me and take me to heaven if I die. Daniel put his faith into practice.

The king had a food-less, entertainment-less, sleepless night worrying about Daniel's fate. As soon as it was light, he hurried to the lions' pit. "As he came near the pit, he cried out in a fearful voice. The king said to Daniel, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, was your God, whom you serve continually, able to rescue you from the lions?'

"Then Daniel spoke with the king. 'Your Majesty, may you live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the mouth of the lions. They have not hurt me because he found me innocent in his presence. Also before you, Your Majesty, I have committed no crime.' Then the king was very glad and said that Daniel should be brought up from the pit. So Daniel was brought up from the pit, and he was unharmed because he trusted in his God."

Daniel put his faith into practice, and he was not let down. And it wasn't just some fortunate coincidence, like the lions just so happen to have been fed recently and so they weren't hungry. Because we're told in the verses after our text that the king then ordered that the men who had maliciously accused Daniel should be thrown into the pit instead of Daniel, and they

didn't even reach the bottom of the pit before the lions attacked and destroyed them. Daniel trusted in God, he put his faith into practice, and God rescued and blessed him.

Perhaps you have already made the connection between this account and the Reformation. One of the main events of the Reformation was Martin Luther's stand at the Diet of Worms. Luther actually would not have gone to Worms if he thought he was only going to be asked to recant. He thought he was actually being summoned to defend himself, and so he headed out. But on the way he found out about the emperor's order to have all his books confiscated. Once he found out, even the imperial herald who was sent to accompany him and guarantee his safe conduct thought he would want to turn back, and asked him if he wanted to do so. But now that Luther had begun his journey, he said, "I will go, even if all the demons should be there." And as he drew closer and closer to the city, he had a determination to make a stand for the truth that he himself said was bordering on madness—but a madness God had given him. You can read in the bulletin what he himself said about how, if there were as many devils lying in wait for him in Worms as there were tiles on the roofs, he would have nevertheless leaped into their midst with joy.

And when he got there and actually heard for himself that the emperor just wanted him to acknowledge his books and then say whether or not he intended to recant them, and thus realized that his life was on the line, that did not stop him from giving his dramatic and moving speech where he concluded, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me." He believed in God, and so he put his faith into practice. And God delivered him, so that even though his stand took place in 1521 and it resulted in the fiercest edict ever issued by a Holy Roman Emperor, Luther did not die until 1546, and he died from natural causes.

Brothers and sisters, if we believe in the truth, that means that we know that what we believe is true, and if we know that what we believe is true, then we should be willing to put our faith into practice. If you truly believe that it's going to hail tomorrow, then you will put your car in the garage today. The same is true in religious matters.

And this should be even more true for us today, when we are not facing fire or lions or some other gruesome execution. We might be facing a failing grade on an assignment if we refuse to express agreement with the theory of evolution in school. We might be facing ridicule or ostracism if we refuse to engage in sexual activity before marriage. To use Peter's words, we might be facing the surprise and slander of unbelievers for not plunging with them into the same overflowing river of filth that they swim in (1 Pet. 4:4). We might be facing, at worst, the loss of our job if we refuse to work on Sunday mornings so that we can attend church. We might be facing a grudge or someone leaving church with their family if we faithfully follow God's word in rebuking sin and carrying out church discipline. But if our predecessors in faith were willing to face fire and lions and other executions, and if God vindicated their faith and delivered them and blessed them, then should any of those things that we have to face be a big deal?

On this Reformation Day, if Luther were alive today, he would remind us that there is One whom God did not spare from execution, but he too was putting his faith into practice—his faith that he was serving his heavenly Father's will and saving us from a fate far worse than prison time or hungry lions or some other gruesome death. Jesus did face execution for us in order to pay for all our sins and to reconcile us with God and to save us eternally. And then God

rescued him not from dying, but from death and the grave, in order to vindicate his faith and his mission. And he promises that all those who steadfastly believe in his Son will likewise be rescued from death and the grave, no matter what their earthly fate might be. That is God's decree, and unlike the laws of the Medes and Persians that could not be revoked…unless the king decided to revoke them, God's decrees stand firm forever.

"And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, let these all be gone. They yet have nothing won. The kingdom's ours forever." That is a faith worth putting into practice, because it is a faith that will always be vindicated in the end. Amen.