



Lectionary 31, Year C

Bishop Don Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod
All Saints' Sunday: Text – Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18

Luke 18:9-14

¹ In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed. Then he wrote down the dream: ² I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, ³ and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.

¹⁵ As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me. ¹⁶ I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation of the matter: ¹⁷ "As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. ¹⁸ But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever."

SERMON TEXT:

Dear Ones, dear Friends,
Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

We gather here on All Saints' Sunday, the day that the Church puts aside to remember those known and dear to us who have died in the last year

It is a Sunday we celebrate, but it is not an easy day, because for many of us, this is a place where we said goodbye to those whose labors have ended, and during the prayers of the church we speak the names of those we have loved or known or whose lives touched ours in such a way that we were blessed.

And because we have gathered on the first Sunday in November, it is also the day that many of us may start talking about our mission for next year; it is the day to once again to think carefully about how and how much you will pledge to support the ministry of this congregation in the year ahead. And we gather (as we do every Sunday) to hear the good news of Christ Jesus.

These are serious things that lie before us, and so, in the face of all that is so serious this morning, the lesson I want to look at is the story of a dream.

It was a dream that Daniel had in the first year of the reign of King Belshazzar of Babylon, and the first question we need to answer is:

Can such a thing still hold any significance for us here today?

Because, and let us be as honest as we can this morning, the truth is that both Belshazzar and Daniel are dead and dust and have been so for more than 2500 years.

Belshazzar ruled a city and an empire that have long since disappeared into the sands of time, and even Daniel himself, one of the Lord's prophets and a hero in the book of the Bible named after him, doesn't really stir the imagination as once he did.

What we remember about him—if we remember anything from our Sunday School days— is that episode with Daniel thrown into the lion's den, when, despite all expectations, both prophet and predators reached a hungry but lasting peace.

But there is more to Daniel's story than just that episode, and if you take the time to look through Daniel's book, what you discover is that for Daniel the lion's den was a relatively minor incident.

He was a prophet you see, and what that means in terms of his role in the Old Testament is that he was one of the folks chosen by God to dream dreams or to see visions of the future --or at least as much of the future as involved the Children of Israel.

God chose a fair number of those folk over the years, folks whose names are the ones we stumble over in the Old Testament lists: Haggai, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk to remember just a few.

There are other prophets that we know better of course: Joseph being one of them--he of the amazing technicolor dreamcoat-- and the way that Joseph saw into the future was similar to Daniel's:

He too had dreams: of fat cows and skinny ones,
of ears of corn and sheaves of wheat,
and of the sun and moon and stars,
Which is to say that a prophet's dreams,
no matter how quaint or incomprehensible they might seem at first, are always worthy of a second and sometimes even a third glance.

Anyway, as one of God's prophets, Daniel dreamed of the future that God had in mind for his faithful people

It was not a job for the faint of heart, especially during the time that Daniel lived and prophesied.

In his lifetime Israel had been decisively defeated in battle, and as a result, most of the ordinary people and all of the surviving leaders had been carried off into exile in Babylon, which was why he found himself in the court of King Belshazzar.

There was no clear sense of what was going to happen to Israel. There was no certainty about what the future held for God's people as they struggled to make new lives for themselves far away from everything they had known and all that was familiar.

But what they held on to--and what held them together – was their sense that even in the midst of their sorrow and suffering, that God had not abandoned them.

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” they asked each other, but they learned to do it because they had to, and because they knew that if they stopped singing, they would forget who they were and where they had come from.

And so it is in that context, and remembering those details about Daniel’s life, that it is worth looking at this dream of his, and working to figure out what that dream might have to say for us here and now.

The first thing to notice is that the dream is not a pleasant one, not in any sense.

The vision of chaos: of the sea being stirred into a maelstrom by the four winds and of the four great beasts heaving themselves out of the pounding waves, is terrifying to the prophet, and maybe to us as well, even if we never have to go near the ocean.

And you may remember that for Israel the sea (or any large body of water, for that matter) was always a place and a symbol of turmoil, fear and doubt:

as far as possible the Israelites preferred to have nothing to do with the sea, and when they did (as in the case of another prophet Jonah, for instance,) nobody was surprised when terrible things went on to happen.

It was no accident that Moses led the people out of Egypt by *walking* through the Red Sea; or that 40 years later Joshua brought them into the Promised Land by crossing the River Jordan on foot

But however we feel about salt water today, what we do recognize from the dream is that feeling of absolute uncertainty, Daniel's frightened, helpless sense that there is nothing stable, nothing dependable, nothing solid upon which to stand.

We don't have such fear of the water perhaps, but certainly we live in times that feel as uncertain and as unstable. And for so many of us there is little prospect for things getting much better anytime soon, Like Daniel, our spirits are troubled, and our visions leave us terrified.

But Daniel's dream does not end there, in chaos and fear, and in God's mercy, neither does ours. For while Daniel sees chaos, and four great beasts that promise years of oppression and hardship, there is at the end of the story of his dream a promise:

A promise that the holy ones of Israel shall receive the kingdom—
Not the kingdom of their dreams, necessarily,
but the kingdom that God has dreamt for them;
kingdom where the hungry are filled,
a kingdom where those who weep can find laughter again.
A kingdom where all of God's faithful servants will be welcomed home.

In Daniel's dream the holy ones receive the kingdom and possess it forever— Forever and ever, in fact, is how that story ends, with the kind of reassurance that marks the ending of the very best kind of dreams.

And so on this All Saints' Day, let us pursue the serious things that are before us:

To remember those we love;
To commit ourselves to partnership
in our ministry for the year ahead;
And to claim the good news spoken through Daniel's dream
Because the church—the holy ones—the saints of God—you and me—we always need a dream. Amen

Copyright © 2025 *The Sermon Supply*

This work is the intellectual property of clergy from the synods of Region 6 of the ELCA. It is provided for use by congregations within these synods for worship, study, and other ministry purposes.

This project is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)**.

This means:

- Congregations may use and share this material for **non-commercial purposes**, provided proper attribution is given to the *The Sermon Supply* and its contributors.
- The material **may not be modified or adapted** without explicit permission.
- Use beyond congregational purposes requires permission from the contributors.

For permissions beyond this license, please contact rwissler@neos-elca.org

License Details: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.