November 25, 2018 Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Pastor Katya Brodbeck - Powell United Methodist Church

“The King of Our Hearts”

We all have a dream or two that will never leave our memory. It might be a nightmare or recurring dream or a dream that had a significant impact on our lives. I have one of those dreams that I will never forget. It was a summer of 2007, when I saw this dream. In fact, I saw this dream just two or three weeks after I became a believer. In this dream I saw my preschool. Preschool that I hated in real life. The teachers were really mean to me or I thought they were. I was constantly sick to my stomach. My parents had to take me to my grandmother's house for a whole year. So, I saw my preschool which means my dream became a nightmare. Then I saw  a big room in the preschool. It was as dark as anything could be in this universe. In real life, I am of afraid of darkness. So, this dream became a double nightmare. As I was in this dark room, I knew that I had to go through the whole room to its other side. I was standing there in the dark paralysed with fear and thinking that there is no way in this universe that I could walk through this thick horrifying darkness. But I knew that I had to go and cross the room. So all of a sudden I began to ask God to be with me as I walk through the darkness. And as I made the first step, the whole room was lit with bright light. I could see the whole room and where I was going. But most importantly, as I was making more steps and was moving to the other side of the room, I had an amazing trust and assurance that God was with me, that God is leading me and guiding and God is ultimately in control and there is nothing to be afraid. When I woke up I could not believe what I just saw and experienced in my dream. That feeling that I had of the assurance that God was with me and there is nothing to be afraid of was very new to me. But I knew that this will be my new life with Christ. I go back to this powerful dream when I am afraid and feel like God has left me.

The message for us this morning from the verses that we read from the Book of Daniel also comes from a powerful dream.  This dream came to Daniel during troubled times for the people of Israel. And this dream encouraged and gave hope to them. The book of Daniel is very inspiring to faith and our trust in God. Even though the stories and events in the book of Daniel happen during the time of the Babylonian captivity of Israel, the book of Daniel was written in the latter part of the second century BCE when the Israelites were oppressed and persecuted by a Hellenistic Greek King, Antiochus Epiphanes. The new king outlawed Jewish religious practices and traditions. He was bringing and promoting Hellenistic culture that was drastically different from the one of the Jews. Hellenistic culture had a blend of various religions and philosophies. It required worship of many “small g” gods and even kings. It encouraged participation in the pagan ceremonies. All of that pressed on the Jews.. They were oppressed and persecuted. There was imminent danger to their lives. And they could not do what they have done for thousands of years as God’s people -  worship the Lord their God. They probably felt scared. They felt like their God was not in charge anymore, that their God was not the king of all the earth. They felt like God left them all by themselves.

And isn’t it the truth for all of us when we go through tough times? When we enter into seasons of darkness and pain. Life challenges, toxic relationships, struggle with mental illness and addiction, financial problems, loss of job or a loved one, or a family or loved ones struggling and there is nothing that we can do about it except for worrying for them. Now especially during the holidays, all those things can become acute for us, if you will. On top of what is happening in our own personal lives, we watch or listen to the news.  We hear of shootings, wildfires, climate change, more storms, ongoing political division.

All of that can bring fear and discouragement into our lives. All of that can overwhelm us and take captive of us. It can take over our minds and our hearts and our whole beings.  It feels like we lose control. It feels like God loses control. And we think that God is not in charge anymore. God left us all by ourselves in our problems and issues and that somehow we have to get out of this mess all by ourselves. That is how we feel sometimes and that is how probably the Israelites felt.

But we know from reading of the Bible and especially the Old Testament, that God never leaves the Israelites and never forsakes them. God sends the prophets to bring the good news and hope. Throughout the book of Daniel, Daniel constantly pointed to all the babylonian kings and then to the whole Babylonian Empire, how great, faithful and all-knowing God was. Daniel’s testimony was about God who was the real king of the whole universe and in charge of everything. Through the stories in the book of Daniel God brought hope for the Israelites.

And in the verses that we read today, the same message is there. In that dream that Daniel saw, he first sees a storm and then four animals, monsters-like who have horns, and wings, and scary iron teeth. So, the dreams starts as a nightmare. The four animals were devouring and destroying everything on their way and were terrifying. That is the first part of Daniel’s dream. It is scary and dark and reflects the reality of the Jews in the Oppression and captivity of the king Antiochus Epiphanes. But we know the second part of the dream. Those are the verses that Pastor Larry read for us. The light is shining brightly. Daniel sees The Ancient of Days with the robe white as snow and the hair white as wool. Thousands of thousands are serving God and then the son of man comes and is given all authority in heaven and earth, dominion over every nation and tribe, and his kingdom will never end.

Just like the dream that I saw eleven years ago continues to strengthen me, the dream that Daniel saw strengthened and encouraged the Jewish people in their times of trouble. You see Daniel’s dream showed that in the midst of darkness, in the midst of the monsters, beasts and terror, there is God who is in charge and reigning over the universe. It reminded them that even though they were captives of Antiochus Epiphanes, they were still the captives of God Most High.

The message of the dream did not only bring hope and encouragement to the Israelites, it brings hope for us today. Our faith makes a difference, my friends. Just like the Israelites, we are captives of our worries, fears and life challenges, but we are still the captives of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For us, Christians, what is very significant in this dream is the image of the son of man, Ben adamah. That image of the son of man is interpreted in various ways  and I know that we cannot jump into a quick conclusion that this is Jesus Christ. But having read through many commentaries and interpretations, I can assure you that we as Christians can claim that the Son of Man here is Jesus the Christ. We can trust that  Jesus is present with us in the midst of darkness and pain. We can give Jesus all our worries, troubles and our whole hearts and let him reign. We can trust that Jesus the Christ is the king of the universe, the king of all kings, and the king of our hearts. And that is what we celebrate today.

Traditionally, the Sunday between Thanksgiving Sunday and First Sunday of Advent, is Christ the King Sunday. We celebrate that everything, this world, this earth, our lives and our deaths, all belong to Christ. It means that the time of Advent is coming and Christmas is only one month away. Now we are going to preoccupy ourselves with Christmas trees, decorations (I know some of us have decorated already), gifts (the statistics say that a ledge percentage of people in the us did their Christmas gift shopping on Thanksgiving), plans for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. But in the midst of all that, let us remember that Advent is the time when we prepare our hearts to meet Christ again and to deepen what it means to have Christ as a king of our hearts.  I invite you to seek ways and opportunities that would draw you closer to God, ways that are refreshing and life-giving to our spirits, that would bring peace and deep joy into our hearts, and would bring deep trust in the reality that Christ is the King. One of the ways you can do it is to participate in church-wide Advent study in one of many small groups that are being offered during the season. Another way is to worship regularly. Each Sunday of Advent has a deep meaning to why we await to celebrate Jesus’s birth with such anticipation. We will light the candles on our Wreath for each Sunday of Advent, sing carols and beloved songs and hear a word of encouragement. Yet another way is to serve those in need in whatever creative ways God is calling you to do.

So as we are entering Advent, may we be reminded that in a small child whose birth we will be celebrating in four Sundays, the promise of God to be with us and never forsake us was fulfilled and that the small child became the king of kings who reigns forever and ever in this whole universe and in our hearts.