



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

July 22, 2021

DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

I don't know how you feel about it, but I am not so keen of times of testing. Nevertheless, whether we like it or not, we might bump into circumstances that we can't control. Reading the Our Daily Bread below, I thought: "I am glad that I didn't have to live through the despotic oppression and genocide carried out by the Nazis, not to mention the deadliest war of human history they generated. Nor the devastation of my homeland and being forced to a foreign land and culture, as Daniel did."

But then I realized the times we have been going through is not less challenging. We definitely can witness a pivotal point in time. The world lost 4.12 million lives, and our routine has changed by the pandemic beyond imagination. I can recall several people saying during and about Covid-19 that there is no going back to the conditions before. It's not what we want to hear...

In the pressure of the changes that have been generated by both the virus *and* the climate change, we still have a choice, and an option that is up to us and not to the circumstances. We can choose to be compassionate and kind, as many people did during the depth of this health crisis. We can choose to take care of others by wearing masks, by physical distancing, and frequent hand washing, although it's 'uncomfortable'. We can choose to do all these, and still cling to the hope that it's not only that "we are in it together", but that "God is with us in this all" as well.

Daniel chose to pray despite of the decree of the emperor of *his time*. He picked being faithful to the God of his ancestors, although he knew his life was on the line. Franz Jägerstätter refused to serve the hatred and destruction of the authorities of *his time*, even if it led to his execution.

What are the demands of *our time*? What are the demands you personally face? Is it peer pressure? Is it something that promises to keep your job or your friends?

Daniel decided that he would risk not obeying the king's law. According to the Book of Daniel the angels of the Lord prevented the lions harming him. Unlike Daniel, Jägerstätter died because of being faithful to the ordinance: "*love your God and love your neighbour*". But I believe even in his death, he was supported and accompanied by the Good Shepherd. He found out the validity of Jesus' words: "**Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.**" (Luke 17:33)

It is a tough statement, but in my understanding, it would be even more dangerous follow demands and decrees that go against the Source of Life. As Jesus reminded his disciples: "**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.**" (Matthew 10:28) He promised to those who decide to be faithful to Him: "**Because I live, you also will live. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.**" (John 14:19; 27)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



Firm Refusal

Daniel . . . still pray[ed] three times a day.

Daniel 6:13

READ Daniel 6:10–23

When the Nazis drafted Franz Jägerstätter during World War II, he completed military basic training but refused to take the required pledge of personal loyalty to Adolf Hitler. Authorities allowed Franz to return to his farm, but they later summoned him to active duty. After seeing Nazi ideology up close and learning of the Jewish genocide, however, Jägerstätter decided his loyalty to God meant he could never fight for the Nazis. He was arrested and sentenced to execution, leaving behind his wife and three daughters.

Over the years, many believers in Jesus—under peril of death—have offered a firm refusal when commanded to disobey God. The story of Daniel is one such story. When a royal edict threatened that anyone “who pray[ed] to any god or human being except [the king]” (Daniel 6:12) would be thrown into the lions’ den, Daniel discarded safety and remained faithful. “Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before” (v. 10). The prophet would bend his knee to God—and only God—no matter the cost.

Sometimes, our choice is clear. Though everyone around us implores us to go along with prevailing opinion—though our own reputation or well-being may be at risk—may we never turn from our obedience to God. Sometimes, even at great cost, all we can offer is a firm refusal.— By **Winn Collier**

REFLECT & PRAY

God, I know my loyalty to You will at times mean saying no to others’ expectations or demands. It may cost me dearly. Give me courage. Amen.

Where are you sensing that obedience to God will require your firm refusal? What might this refusal cost you? What will you gain?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

The integrity and loyalty of Daniel echo similarities in the life and story of Joseph. About eight hundred years before Daniel was chosen to be second-in-command to a Babylonian king (Daniel 6:3), Joseph was made second-in-command of all Egypt (Genesis 41:40–41). In their younger years, both had been taken from their homes and families and forced into captivity in foreign lands. Both eventually interpreted the dreams of emperors who served other gods. Through abandonment and imprisonment both are remembered for showing God’s care not only for those who knew Him, but for those who didn’t. – By **Mart DeHaan**

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