

Find a New Groove For Your World (Daniel 6:19-26)

A sermon for the people of Grace UMC – Alamogordo & Tularosa (September 20, 2020)

We're not perfect as a church, are we? If you're worshipping with us for the very first time, and you're looking for that perfect church with no problems whatsoever, a church that's never done anything wrong, a church that's never intentionally or unintentionally turned people away, a church that has it all figured out, well, we're not it. And I'm not that pastor, I'm not perfect, but I am striving for perfection in the love and grace of Christ, and our church is too, amen! That's why we call ourselves Methodists, because we believe that by the grace of God and God alone that our lives can be better today than they were yesterday. But the implications of that very statement is that my life, and our life as a church, today, isn't as good as it could be, and we will make mistakes, we all falter, and sometimes, sadly, those mistakes have life-altering, potentially world-changing implications.

Many of you know that Shannon and I and our kids were once living as missionaries in the Mediterranean world, but what you don't know is that our hope, our dream, and more than that--God's call on our life--was for us to be career missionaries: living and working at least 15-20 years overseas and planting churches where there are no churches. That was the dream, that was the hope, that was the call, and Shannon and I devoted a whole decade of our life to that call. We began taking missionary training classes together before we were even married. We both went on international short-term mission trips to hone and discern our calling from God. After we married, we served in leadership at a local church as staff and as volunteers. We then spent three years of our life in seminary, both of us doing as much training and preparation as we could to ready ourselves for sharing Jesus in a world and a culture that we would be foreign to. After that came 2 years of ministry fundraising, where we traveled all around West Texas and New Mexico raising 100% of our own funds to be able to move and permanently live

overseas. After that came what would have been the start of 3 years of intense cultural and language immersion, first a year of language school in France, followed by 2 years in Africa, learning another two languages on top of French... at least, that was the plan.

Life was going really well in Africa, we were truly thriving, we were learning the language, our French was getting better, we were close to purchasing our own house. We were beginning to make relationships with our neighbors. We had a happy, healthy 4 year old boy, and Shannon's pregnancy with Edie was going about as smoothly as it could go. God's hand was so clearly on our lives! We could start to truly see how this new adventure of ours was quickly becoming our life, our norm, our home, our purpose. We felt more in line with God's call on our lives than ever before, and we were so confident in God's ability and promise to work through us to bring others to faith in Jesus Christ. The world was going to change for Christ, and we were going to be part of it! I know some of you might chalk it up to young, wide-eyed idealism, but that couldn't be anything from the truth. It was a call from God, and God alone. Only He could do what he did to bring us that far in our journey. But then... then it all just fell apart, because the actions of one person, the lifestyle of one man, ruined it all.

You see, our team leader on the field, well, his true colors started to shine forth, and we quickly realize that he had no value at all for Shannon as a person or as a partner in ministry. To him, Shannon was simply my wife who clearly had her place in the world, and she should stay there. This got so bad that we realized that neither Shannon, nor August, nor our unborn daughter should have to grow up in such a ministry environment. So we went through our ministry procedure of requesting a transfer to a different team in the country we were serving in, and in the process, the team leader we were leaving told Shannon and I straight to our faces

that because we were leaving and the things we had accused him of, he would make sure that we didn't get on any team in the area... and he was right, we didn't. We were asked to pack up our things and leave. We always knew there was a possibility that the local government could ask us to leave at any moment because we were American Christians, we never in a million years through it would be the church.

Remember, we were thriving! Good ministry was on the verge of happening as Shannon and I were *just* beginning to build relationships, relationships that showed so much promise for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to flourish in. But it all came crashing down because of the aspects of one man's life whose umbilical, unholy, and downright vulgar view of my wife and daughter, and his subsequent slander of us. I don't say all of this for your pity, because Shannon and I are truly happier now, here in the place, than we've been for a very, very long time. I don't at all believe God caused any of this to happen, but he has redeemed this in our lives to bring us to a place of wholeness and healing. No, I don't say this for you to feel sorry for us. I say this to make this one point: If the unholy living of a Christian and the Church can do so much damage, how much more impactful could our holy living be? How more life-changing could our biblical living be in the lives of others. How much could this world change, how much of this world could be saved, if we, together lived according to God's new groove in our lives?

We've focused so much on ourselves these past few weeks, and that's good. God does indeed want you as individual people to live the most abundant lives possible, and we've discovered a few ways to do that in a world that is so crazy and chaotic. We discovered the groove of prayer. Just like Daniel prayed three times a day in the most hectic time of his life, he still took time to pray, and we've been praying our Groove Prayer, saying: *God of love and God*

of grace, / Rule in me and set the pace. / Often life feels out of sync; / O'er the chaos I can't think. / Victorious, if in you we move. / Every step, God, be my groove. AMEN. I hope that prayer has been a gift to you this past month, as I know it has been for me.

We've also discovered the groove of regular communion with God through sharing his meal of Bread and Wine with him. This is the culmination of Christian worship. This is the means by which we are promised the *most* of God... why wouldn't we want even more of it in our lives in the most crazy and chaotic periods many of us have ever lived through? That's why we not only offer Communion to literally anyone who longs for it every Sunday here at our Alamogordo Campus, but also every Wednesday from 5-7 pm in our newly launched *Drive-Through Prayer and Communion*, which I blessed to be able to say that people who have never before received Communion here have showed up, just wondering what we were doing, and they were prayed over and received the love and grace of Christ through this meal of ours.

Then we discovered that we can not only share a meal with God, but we can offer the same love and grace to others that God offers to us as we share a meal with another person, and we challenged ourselves to just eat one extra meal with another person in our week. Just one more chance to share hospitality with each other, to share life and love and grace and peace with each other, to put down our devices, turn off the TVs and just be with one another because in those moments we not only truly see each other, but we can see Jesus even more!

So many beautiful new grooves that God wants us to start living by, including last week's groove of not getting annoyed by people, but instead looking at them and seeing the very image of God in them. I promise you that the moment we start seeing God in people more than the things in them that annoy us, our lives, and the lives of those who annoy us, will be so

much better. And all of these grooves, the groove of prayer, the groove of communion, the groove of sharing meals with each other, and groove of loving others instead of getting annoyed by them, can literally save our lives from the chaos and noise that is 2020. Just as I'm absolutely convinced it saved Daniel too in today's scripture passage.

I'm convinced that Daniel was able to keep his cool, and remain steadfast in his faith because he was just the sort of guy to practice these very grooves. We know for a fact that Daniel stayed in communion with God because we're told as much and discovered as much a month ago when we first learned that he prayed three times every day! We also know earlier in this book that he had some really, really good friends, who were Jewish just like he was, who were ripped from their home land just like he was, who was forced into service in the conquering king's palace just like he was, their names were Shadrack, Meshack, and Abed-nego... some of you may of heard of these guys before. Don't you think that these four Jewish men, ripped from all that thew knew and loved, don't you think that they would have gathered together regularly and ate together, fellowshiped together, enjoyed each other's company together in the midst of their chaos? You better believe they did!

And don't you think that Daniel is just the sort of guy to keep his cool and actually love those who annoyed him, and I promise you people annoyed him. He was living in exile! He was surrounded by people who didn't at all make sense to him! They dressed funny. They ate funny. Their music was weird. They spoke an entirely different language... you better believe people got on his nerves! ut through all of this, we know people loved him. He didn't let their annoyance getting under his skin, he loved them nonetheless, and we see proof of that the moment the king runs to the lion's den to see if Daniel is still alive: **“When he [the king] came**

near the den where Daniel was, he cried out anxiously to Daniel, ‘O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?’”

(Dan. 6:20). A king who hated Daniel wouldn’t ask such a question. A king whose life hadn’t been touched by Daniel’s own life of love, holiness, and biblical living wouldn’t have asked such a question. A king who didn’t see God’s new groove at work in Daniel’s life wouldn’t have ask such a question.

And yes, Daniel’s God had saved him. God’s great groove of salvation worked mightily in Daniel’s life, and it shone through mightily in this moment right here... all culminating to this one, singular moment where we see that Daniel’s groove with God not only saved Daniel, but it also saves an entire nation! Just the opposite happened to Daniel and the Babylonians than what happen with Shannon and I on the mission field. One person’s life brought an end to a fruitful ministry for us, while here in the book of Daniel one persons’ life--Daniel’s holy, groovy, life--brought God’s salvation to an entire Empire: **“Then the King was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den... Then King Darius wrote to all peoples and nations of every language throughout the whole world: ‘May you have abundant prosperity! I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed.’”** (Dan. 6:23a, 25-26). Now, I’m not drawing a straight line from Daniel’s three times a day praying and the King’s decree. I’m not drawing a line from the fact that he clearly loved his enemies instead of getting annoyed by them to the king’s decree. But I am drawing a line, a very clear and present line in this whole book, that it is because of the entirety of God’s love, and the way it shown through Daniel’s faithful living through the most chaotic moments in

Israel's history, that Daniel not only discovered a new groove, but so did an entire world. You see, church, it's not just you who need a new groove, the world does too! And the most powerful way that this world will discover a new groove is not from some president or governor. It's not from the democrats or the republicans. It's not from wealth or prestige. It's not from this self-help speaker or that one. It's not from this government program or that. It's not from a COVID-19 vaccine. God's new groove doesn't pour out on this world through any of that. No, God's new groove in the year 2020 is best proclaimed and demonstrated, and given to the world through you, the church, right here, right now, today!

We don't just discover a new groove for ourselves, but our overwhelming desire should actually be to discover a new groove in our lives for the sake of others! Others who are heartbroken. Other's whose life is in strife. This is what we are for. This is who we are for. We are for the heartbroken and lost. We are for the disenfranchised and downtrodden. We are for the poor and oppressed and for those in the prisons of their lives. Our new groove isn't for us, it's for them! **Living to God's new Groove in your life / Brings Christ's healing to the world's heartache and strife.**

So, church let's not just get in the groove of prayer for our sake, let's pray for the world's sake. Let's not just get in the groove of regular communion with God for our sake, but let's do it for the world's sake. Let's not just get in the groove of eating and fellowshiping with others for our sake, but let's do it for the world's sake. Let's not just get out of the groove of annoyance and into the groove of love for our sake, let's do it for the world's sake. God's new groove saved Daniel, but it also saved Daniel's king, and thus an Empire. God's new groove can save you, and can save your world in 2020, too! Let us pray...