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Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Have you ever wondered where God was during times of your life?

Often I think this question percolates for us when we are overwhelmed. When personal crisis strikes us or our families. Or when tragedy on a grand scale touches our lives. I was living near Albany NY when the September 11th attacks occurred in 2001. Everyone I knew had a loved one or friend who lived or worked in New York City. It may not have happened in our backyard, but it was close to all of our homes and loved ones. I heard many people trying to figure out where God was in the mix of it all.

We find ourselves stunned by our world. Should this stuff be happening?

Where is God, anyway?

Our vision from Daniel comes out of a time of similar questioning. Today's passage begins in the middle of Daniel's vision. In the preceding verses, the prophet saw four animals – a lion with wings, a bear with tusks, leopard with wings, and something with iron teeth and ten horns. They seem bizarre and obscure to us, when we listen to the descriptions now. However, the particular animals would have been obvious to the listeners of the time. It's as if someone had a dream that featured an

elephant and a donkey. We all know that they would represent Republicans and Democrats. Centuries later, or in another country, people wouldn't have a clue what they really meant.

The four beasts are symbols that stand for different empires in the area. The Babylonian, the Median, and the Persian empires, in addition to the one headed by Alexander the Great. These four terrifying creatures were seen devouring the world around them. Daniel's vision was threatening and violent. It was an interpretation of the world that Daniel lived in. He was surrounded by warring powers that violently attacked their neighbors.

We may not imagine our trials with the same vivid imagery as Daniel. But we certainly speak about obstacles in a similar way. They are personified – and become a sort of creature for us. Diseases like cancer often get a “The” before them. Our news is filled with reports of how The Economy or The Job Market affect people. For many folks, The Government has an animal-like threat. Personally, it's The Bills that plague me. Or Time that runs away when I try to keep it on a leash.

Daniel's vision of God appears after his vision of such violent powers. It is as though the vision is God's answer to the question: where is God in this anyway? The Ancient One is seated on the throne. It is clear that God has power and

authority over all. There may be other powers that cause awful changes and problems in our lives. There may be powers that seek to manipulate and control us. Those times and powers will come and go. God is ultimately the one in control.

In literature of other nearby religions at the time, there were common illustrations of a saving god. These other gods, like Baal, were often shown as riding the clouds down to humanity. The far-off god draws near and makes everything better.

But Daniel's vision is different than the standard picture. It is not the Ancient One who comes down in the clouds. "[O]ne like a human being" (*Dan 7:13*) appears with the clouds. Instead of coming down, he is brought to the Ancient One on the throne. People at the time most likely interpreted that God was choosing a human king. One whom God would grant the authority to rule and save on earth, in God's name. This would have been a miraculous action from God, in the midst of the creatures that devour humanity.

As Christians, we look back on this Jewish reading and see our Trinitarian God. There is the God of Israel, who sits on the throne as Lord of heaven and earth. And the Word, who comes to us in the clouds as Jesus Christ, king of creation. For those of us who did not meet Jesus in person, there is the Spirit of Christ, Who dwells and moves among us even now, Teaching and guiding and blessing us

Returning to the Question

Daniel's vision can not answer many of our questions of faith. But it does tell how God relates to what can seem like dramatic – or traumatic – changes in our lives. We live among powers on earth that are not always friendly. At times, they may frighten us and devour our lives. At times, our collective sin as humans has the same effect.

Our scripture reminds us that God is still in charge. Earlier in the book of Daniel, the prophet says:

“Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things: he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him.” *(Dan 2:20-22)*

No matter what happens to us, wisdom and power are God's. The things of our life will change – times, seasons, and rulers. Amid them all, God is the giver of all wisdom and understanding. He knows the darkness that crowds upon us. Light dwells with him.

And that's not all! Our God is not just one who sits in the clouds, overseeing our world from afar. We have a saving God who comes to us, as one like a human

being. Who comes to us even though we are broken people. Who comes to us when life is darkest and we long for light. Christ has dwelt with us and known the darkness that engulfs us. He will bring light to our dim days. The beasts who threaten will not prevail.

Of course, this does not mean that Jesus is going to come and fix everything – like we talked about in the children’s sermon. God does not promise to make our lives easy. But our souls will not be threatened, for God is with us in the fray. Through Jesus, we receive strength and courage to be faithful, as he was. Through Jesus, we receive comfort and peace. Through Jesus, we know that there is a bigger story of our lives, one that will not be devoured by beasts, or sin, or death.

So our text answers our question: where is God? God is present with us. Watching over us, even as we experience darkness in our lives. Coming to be with us and to deliver us. Willing that justice and mercy and peace will emerge from all of our lives.