November 22, 2026 *Marion* Weekly Update

Sermon "Unsticking Ourselves" 1 Samuel 15:7-10, Mark 2:13-17

Have you ever gotten your car stuck? Not dead battery stuck. Stuck as in snow, ice, mud, etc. The tires spin fine. Engine runs but all you do is stay in one place without moving. And the harder you hammer down on the gas, the worse it gets. You are stuck.

Some folks have no idea how to get unstuck in this situation.

Others have some strategies. I've always favored rocking forward and back trying to build up momentum to pop out of the hole. Most times this has worked for me. I've also been told to keep some kitty litter in the trunk during the slipperier months. Toss some in the rut under the tire and hopefully it gets enough traction to jump free from hole.

I'm sure some of you have other things you do as well.

Sadly, sometimes even the strategies we have don't work which puts us no different than if we had no strategies at all in the moment. Which means we need help.

It might be some folks willing to kindly put some muscle into it and push us out. Maybe someone goes bumper to bumper and nudges us out. Someone might have a chain and can pull us out. Regardless, we're not getting unstuck on our own.

Our lives can get in the same spot. We feel like something or most things in our life isn't moving. We are frustrated. We can get depressed, angry, lost, all kinds of different experiences. The thing is this isn't typically as easy to get out of as a physical push or kitty litter. We are dealing with experiences of the mind, heart, and/or spirit.

Like the car sometimes we don't know what to do, and we need help. Others we have ideas and get unstuck. Still other times no matter what we try we need an assist.

Scripture has plenty of both the stuck and unstuck.

This morning we read about King Saul. Saul was stuck for most of his life. He was stuck in jealousy, anger, and ultimately madness towards David. Perhaps as a result he was stuck in a place where he wouldn't follow God's instructions. Through it all he ruined his life and many relationships.

Samuel tried to help him. David tried. His son Jonathan tried. It seems Saul simply didn't want to budge. As such he burned the bridge with his mentor Samuel. He alienated David. And I can't help but think his relationship with his son Jonathan took a bad turn when Saul tried to kill him with a spear.

This "stuckness" led Saul to a miserable life and finally in battle died by his own hand.

Pharaoh in Egypt was stuck. Moses and Aaron asked him to let the Hebrews to go worship for a few days in the wilderness. Even through plague after plage Pharaoh refused again and again. Was it pride? Fear? Something else? Whatever it was he wasn't moving.

Even when he finally released them his bitterness overtook him again and he stent the army chasing after the Hebrews. Ultimately his inability to get unstuck hurt himself and his people. The plagues brought destruction while sparing the Hebrews. His own firstborn along with the rest in Egypt died. His army was destroyed. All because he refused to get unstuck.

Jonah was stuck. He hated the people of Ninevah. God asked him to go preach to them. In his hatred he disobeyed. This almost got him drowned and an unpleasant encounter with a big fish. Begrudgingly Jonah did what he was asked and the Ninevites changed and were spared. You'd think that he'd be glad to see the people he hated change for the better and to know he was the instrument of that change.

Nope. He kept on hating them. The story ends with a saved Ninevah and a miserable Jonah. His unwillingness to move out of his hate brought his own misery.

Staying stuck is never a good thing.

On the other hand we have Joseph. A spoiled brat who was hated by his brothers. The were going to kill him but sold him into slavery instead. Jospeh was up and down from there.

He does well in his first master, Potiphar's, household. Then Potiphar's wife falsely accuses Joseoph of rape and he's put in prison. He shows good character and is given it seems as good a life as one could have in prison. Two of the Pharaoh's servants end up in jail and Joseph interprets their dreams. One is executed, the other spared and returned to his job promising to remember Joseph to Pharaoh. He forgets leaving Joseph still in jail. Finally Pharaoh needs help with some dreams and he remembers Joseph. Joseph helps the Pharaoh and so impresses him that Pharaoh puts him second in command in Egypt. Joseph saves all Egypt from famine, and his family, including the brothers who sold him off, have to come looking to him for food. He forgives them, saves them, and gives them good land on which to settle to ride out the famine.

Joseph never got or stayed stuck. You can't tell me that being sold, falsely imprisoned, forgotten about after doing a favor didn't bring up some bitterness, anger, and frustration. It had to. He was human after all.

What he didn't do is dwell in that negativity. At every turn he leaned into his Godly character and integrity and over and over he improved his situation.

I would also argue that not staying stuck is why he embraced his family. In continuing to forge forward and even find success, something brought out grace in him rather than vengeance and bitterness. So when he finally had the chance he met his family with love, compassion and mercy.

Look at the disciples. Our scripture highlights Levi, or Matthew. I would argue that most if not all of them were stuck in their position of life. They were grown and had carved out an existence. Fishermen, a tax collector, a likely violent zealot. They were who they were. Until Jesus got them unstuck.

These disciples found a new way, new purpose, new calling, and new mission. They allowed themselves to move beyond themselves and be transformed. The result was these humble, some even hated, men transformed the world and the lives all around them with the gospel they experienced and received.

Paul is the poster child for this. He was stuck in his arrogance and hatred for the Christians. He persecuted, jailed, and likely killed them wherever he could. Until he experienced Jesus. Then everything changed.

Instead of hating his enemies now he loved them. He even pitied and was sad for them when they couldn't embrace Jesus as he had. In getting unstuck he too changed the world around

him. Forming the Gentile church much of what Christians believe today is rooted in some form or influence of Paul. Getting unstuck propelled his legacy 2,000 years down the road to us.
In these instances what made the difference? Because getting unstuck made all the difference to them. It was their faith in God. It was their relationship with Jesus and following His example. In most cases getting unstuck took more than themselves. It took intervention from others as well. I would argue that this is God using people as instruments of grace to help people move forward.
There are many ways to get stuck:
Mental: We have a problem we can't solve. Could be work, home, relationship, etc. Whatever it is our mind is stumped. Then someone makes a comment, we hear a song, we read something or see something and BANG! the lightbulb goes on and we wonder "why didn't I see that before?" In the end we got unstuck with some help.
Emotional: People get emotionally stuck all the time. Often it's in bitterness or resentment, grief, anger or some other negative emotion. Sometimes we can be in it so long that even the painful is comfortable. It's normal. We can't remember what it's like to not feel that way and even good change can be terrifying. It's often also humbling.
We need someone to lean on. Someone to talk to. Someone to remind us that grace, compassion, hope, peace, and forgiveness are still available. We just have to want it, and they will walk with us as we find it and find a better way. They remind us that the compassion, love, and grace of Jesus are there for us. And that offering the same to the world and those in it is often the freedom that unsticks us and helps us move forward in light, goodness, and faithfulness.
Spiritual: People get spiritually stuck all the time. It happens when we feel like we've got this faith thing all figured out. Most people say they don't, but here's a litmus test. Anyone who refuses to listen to, entertain, or honestly consider something just because it disagrees with them thinks they've got it figured out. If they didn't they would be curious enough to find out where they are off base.
Others get stuck in the tension. They know what they have experienced and what they've proven out but the church is telling them not to believe their own eyes, ears, and reality. Thoughtful, intelligent, thinking people suspend all of those qualities when they walk into church many times because there are questions they are "not allowed" to ask or facts they are "not allowed" to accept. Some stay in the church and feel continually awkward, or just shut down their critical thinking to exist there. Others leave because they feel dishonest with themselves and refuse to live in that space. Often they stay left with those questions and stuck just like their counterparts in the church.
Others get hurst so badly by the church that they get stuck in their hurt and bitterness. They dare to ask the questions or give some pushback and sometimes are shamed, berated, and/or ridiculed. They leave and church becomes a source of evil, not good in their experience.
No matter what kind of stuck we get, there are frequently two things that have to happen to get unstuck. First we have to want to. Someone who wants to stay stuck most often will. Second, we have to find the people able and willing to walk with us out of the hole into whatever comes next.

I want us to think specifically about Jesus and the disciples. There were people who were stuck. These were the ones Jesus scolded harshly. They were religious people who refused to see anything but what was instilled in and convenient for them. The leaders like this actually wanted to keep everyone else just as stuck. Stuck people are easier to control.
But not Jesus.
His disciples could have gotten stuck time and time again. There were times when Jesus sort of showed them up. Times when He had to correct them. Times He got frustrated with them. This tells us they weren't perfect and had a lot of learning to do. But here's the grand combination. No matter how they bumbled they wouldn't leave Jesus. They stuck with Him. They took the correction and dared to take on the cause of ministry with Him. They didn't want to get or stay stuck.
Jesus for His part never kicked them to the curb. He always stuck with them. He had the patience to walk with them and plant seeds that would one day grow into incredible faith. He say their potential and it was worth whatever frustrations they might bring. Ultimately Jesus hands them the keys to ministry after his ascension. In fact at one point He even tells them they will do greater things than He had.
The perfect combination of people not wanting to stay stuck and the right person there to help them move forward from transformation to transformation.
I want to remind us this morning that if you are stuck today, or when you get stuck down the road you don't have to stay there.
Our faith has a calling on our hearts that gives us a model of what we can aspire to and achieve. That calling is a big key to getting unstuck. If nothing else because at the center of our faith is hope. Hope for tomorrow and hope for today.
God has a way of putting people in our lives to be a lifeline when we are stuck. We just have to find them and be humble enough.
Finally I believe that we have something that those early disciples had. That same Redeemer sees the potential in you and I. He knows the calling we have. He knows what we can transform into next. Just like for His first disciples, I believe for His disciples today He wants us to not get stuck. To keep moving forward even if it's a baby step at a time.
And if that's what is seen, then we serve a God that, through the Spirit, can help us with strength, comfort, and the discernment to get wherever it is we are supposed to go.

BIBLE STUDY Daniel 1

Daniel is a beloved book of the Old Testament. As we begin the study there are some interesting facts about the book that may be helpful to frame up the reading.

This book to Christians is considered a book of prophecy. In Jewish tradition it doesn't hold that same distinction. It is considered a "writing". In some ways it almost demotes the book. It is a wonderful story mixed with visions. Christians tend to regard its significance more highly. End times fervor may be part of this fascination, though we will see that the visions in Daniel were in reality about events within reach of the book and have already occurred rather than end of world.

As a writing it lends itself according to man scholars as a blend of folk stories set in the Babylonian exile with the intention of giving the reader a senses of God's presence, hope, and willingness to intervene on behalf of God's people. Others see it as more of a genuine history of events. Each of these perspectives offers its own pros and cons in interpreting and explaining the events in the book itself. Seen as history it has a more imminent, real feel. It also requires some explanation in the fantastical and almost absurd circumstances(think the fiery furnace and a king degraded to acting like an insane beast). Seen as folk tales the truths of God's goodness, intervention, and hope remain. The fantastical events require less explanation because they are more vehicles to reveal truth than they are actual reporting of events.

The book itself is written in two languages, Aramaic and Hebrew. The languages encompass entire portions of the book. This indicates at least two different authors and the book being put together over time rather than just written in a single instance. The setting of Daniel is mid 500s BCE. The dating of the completed writing of the book is mid 100s BCE putting the setting and the finished writing 400 years apart. Likely it was compiled over a good span of time. This might not give us a lot to go on in terms of how the stories were passed along and by whom. It does remind us that every book in scripture is written for a purpose. By the time Daniel would have been completed the people of Israel and Judah would have endured a lot of persecution and hardship. This book, set in one of the darkest hours of Judah, the Babylonian Exile, sets a tone of hope in our faithfulness to God and God's faithfulness to us. For a people in consistent if not constant struggle it is a message that inspires faith and the ability to endure.

Finally, if you would like some additional reading there are books that add to Daniel. They are found in the Apocrypha, the group of books discarded from the Protestant Bible and written in the time between the Old and New Testaments. These are the books of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, the Song of the Three Young Men, and the Prayer of Azariah.

The chapter itself is a great set up for the book. I suggest that in many ways it is an outline for the book.

We see the exile described briefly. Of note is that in this exile, mostly the ones taken captive were upper class. They were the influential, educated, noble, and more sophisticated. The lower classes were in large part likely left behind. Babylon was grabbing the cream of the crop. In Ezra and Nehemiah we see the captives given the chance to return home, which many did. They didn't return to an empty land. They returned to a land in disrepair, but still occupied by their people who were discouraged and disheartened.

The King is looking for "high end" young men to enter his court in service. Daniel and his three friends are selected for a three year training program to "Babylonize" them in literature, language, and culture. They, of course, are more than up to the task.

Then something happens that is often dismissed. They give them Babylonian names in place of their Hebrew ones. Why would they do this?

Our names are an essential part of our identities. Taking that away is intended to take away who we are. Replacing the name is intended to pull us into a new culture at the expense of our own. This has been a ploy of conquerors all throughout history. Heritage is important to every one of us. When that heritage is erased it's as if an entire people has died.

Control by and loyalty to a conquering empire is easier when a culture is broken. It breaks the will. It forces and assimilation on every level.

Daniel and friends take this, but notice what happens immediately. And this is part of the pattern in the book. Daniel can give in to some things but he will under no circumstances deny or back away from his God. They push with a renaming, and Daniel pushes back on his own boundaries.

They are part of a larger cadre of people being trained. I would suggest that likely the Babylonians were pulling similar young men from other groups of captives. The demand is that they all eat the rich foods from the kings table. For whatever reason, this to Daniel breaks his Jewish dietary rules. It may have contained foods that were off limits. Perhaps the food was sacrificed to an idol, which would have been an absolute "no go." Whatever the case Daniel and his friends couldn't eat it.

The official doesn't want to let them eat just vegetables and water. He's not worried about them. He's worried about himself. If on his watch these fellows start looking sickly and gaunt he could face execution.

Now we see a combination of wisdom, tact, and incredible faith from Daniel that defines the rest of this story. He offers a brief challenge. Give it 10 days allowing him and his friends to eat what they want. If they look sick, then they will gladly eat whatever they are offered from the king's table. If not they get to continue their diet.

Note the confidence here. In no reality would 10 days make that huge a difference. Yet Daniel knows his God. He knows the end before it ever arrives. He knows they will be healthy and strong. Not only does this prove out, but they are stronger and better looking than the ones eating the king's food.

Daniel throughout the book isn't so much trying to show anyone up as he is being faithful. Time and again God is in the equation and so he is assured to come out on top.

Then comes yet another theme. When the official sees how well this diet works he makes all of the others go on it as well. Imagine how you'd feel. You've been eating delicious, rich food and wine from the king's table. Now because of some punk you have to survive on nothing but vegetables and water. I'd imagine there were some hard feelings. Once again, this follows through the story. Daniel's steadfastness is faith, not ego. Nevertheless others will dislike and even hate him because of the results.

The tension begins in the very first chapter.

Finally we see the quality of Daniel and his friends. They are far better equipped than anyone else in the kingdom. Over and over they will show their quality. We also get a peak at Daniel's additional skill set. He can interpret visions and dreams. This will come in handy later in the book.

The stage is set. And in the first chapter alone three whole years have passed. Daniel and his friends have both completed their training and yet seemingly been able to hold strong to their faith in their God.

One final observation. It's no accident how Daniel is portrayed. There are echoes of other incredible figures from Israel's history. In times of hardship, there was another figure who stood strong in his faith and had the ability to interpret dreams and visions. Joseph. His gifts allowed him to climb the ranks in Pharaoh's kingdom. Daniel was compared to the king's magicians and enchanters. He was superior. Another person faced off against a ruler's magicians and was found to be superior. Moses.

Daniel is in line with some of the great heroes of ancient Israel. In our Christian tradition he cements himself also as a hero of faith.