



THIS IS YOUR SPACE BELONG

REFLECTION POINTS 7 JUNE 2020

READING – DANIEL 5:1-9, 17-31

“ King Belshazzar made a great festival for a thousand of his lords, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand.

2 Under the influence of the wine, Belshazzar commanded that they bring in the vessels of gold and silver that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³So they brought in the vessels of gold and silver* that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

5 Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall of the royal palace, next to the lampstand. The king was watching the hand as it wrote. ⁶Then the king's face turned pale, and his thoughts terrified him. His limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.

17 Then Daniel answered in the presence of the king, 'Let your gifts be for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else! Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and let him know the interpretation. ¹⁸O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar kingship, greatness, glory, and majesty. ¹⁹And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. He killed those he wanted to kill, kept alive those he wanted to keep alive, honoured those he wanted to honour, and degraded those he wanted to degrade. ²⁰But when his heart was lifted

up and his spirit was hardened so that he acted proudly, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and his glory was stripped from him. ²¹He was driven from human society, and his mind was made like that of an animal. His dwelling was with the wild asses, he was fed grass like oxen, and his body was bathed with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and sets over it whomsoever he will. ²²And you, Belshazzar his son, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this! ²³You have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven! The vessels of his temple have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them. You have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know; but the God in whose power is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways, you have not honoured.

24 'So from his presence the hand was sent and this writing was inscribed. ²⁵And this is the writing that was inscribed: mene, mene, tekel, and parsin. ²⁶This is the interpretation of the matter: mene, God has numbered the days of² your kingdom and brought it to an end; ²⁷tekel, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; ²⁸peres,* your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.'

29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed in purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made concerning him that he should rank third in the kingdom.

30 That very night Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed. ³¹*And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

REFLECTION POINTS

Background notes to set the scene:

- there are arguments around whether or Daniel was a real person – I say, who cares! What matters is what we are drawing from the book of Daniel not a discussion around historical accuracy which is doomed to fail. However, be aware of such discrepancies
- Daniel was taken as a child into Babylonian exile. His wisdom and integrity were recognised and he worked for successive kings interpreting dreams
- his integrity was such that he would not worship the Babylonian gods or even pretend to
- he was blessed by God with the gift of interpreting dreams and visions and God communicated with him via dreams
- the book of Daniel contains some awful passages that are interpreted by some as revenge texts and thus used to justify violence – a great example why we should read the whole of the Bible and not just the bits we like or support our own views
- it is sometimes referred to as the part 1 and the book of Revelation as part 2
- it is apocryphal literature and not to be taken literally
- it is hugely symbolic and some of it is taken up again in Revelation – the author John would have known the Jewish apocryphal texts well and drawn upon them

In this text today, it is very Harry Potter with a handwriting on the wall. But what interests me is the way Daniel responds to King Belshazzar. He re-tells the story of his father Nebuchadnezzar and his rise and downfall. There are lessons in the past – the past affects the future. The telling of story is important for so many cultures whether it's in Dublin around the open fire in the pub, around a campfire in the Kimberley, or in church on a Sunday morning. Stories of the past help us to understand who we are and where we've come from. And they often affect our dreams looking forward.

- do you have any experience of storytelling?
- we're told to pass on the stories and traditions to the next generation and those yet unborn – how do we do that? Think beyond Sunday school!
- how can we use stories to form faith in our community of different generations?
- how can all ages be involved?
- what do you take away from today?