

In the year of our Queer lord 2022 society's white knuckle grip on heteronormativity might just be at an all time high ... or perhaps just more visible. Our bodies are meticulously being picked apart law by law and fight by fight... just this week elected officials in Florida are debating stripping the very health care that trans humans need to live... Personhood and human rights are constantly under attack. It's exhausting. Discouraging and worrisome.

Each morning our phone pushes notifications of hate and our calm apps sit silent ... how could we find solitude in a world full of chaos?

You need to know that I love the book of Daniel. As a queer trans nonbinary person I find solitude in Daniel's trans identity and deep commitment to subverting the Empire at every turn in their living.

Daniel is facing chaos, too. A trans person living in exile, separated from their place of worship, nourishing food, clothes that make them feel alive, and living in an Empire state that demands a certain identity of them.

Sound familiar? Our present moment in this world Middle is full of propaganda that screams at us from Facebook posts to the way elected officials like to tell lies of how we must fight those in our own neighborhoods to maintain the glory of God.

The Glory of God is no blade or bald eagle... the Glory of God is within our tender bodies holding us as we navigate restrooms, bars, schools, libraries, grocery stores and every day moments of life where we choose this movement of justice and love over hatred and violence.

Daniel makes a choice in the beginning of their story to find a way to subvert Empire, work within this world and stay true to not only their faith but their identity.

Daniel decides that dysphoria doesn't mean losing yourself. And in this moment of text read today, Daniel shows us the ultimate choice of defiance in favor of love.

Depending on how you grew up, you probably heard of Daniel and the Lion's den and maybe even saw images depicted of that moment of triumph. But, I am so interested in why we haven't heard of the moments before Daniel was arrested and taken away.

Because those moments are more informative for us than the lions.

Middle we are no strangers to subversion. And we know that when you push on the normative, they will scream and whine. This happens to Daniel and by Daniel's own community, too.

Sometimes we can become so desperate for survival that we forget what liberation and freedom looks like, tastes like and that collectively we make that possible. Daniel was a beacon for the collective and the collective has started to forget their pact to stick together in this new exilic world.

Daniel's friends sought to find a way to expose them. What can get Daniel in trouble and removed from this world so that they don't jeopardize our survival with their "antics."

Daniel's just being too trans... being too loud.. Being too defiant ... we just need to walk the line... meet in private and hang tight.. Surely this empire will die and we'll be ok soon enough....

So they pick Daniel's faith; Daniel's body as a means of persecution.

"Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to their God and praise them, just as Daniel had done previously."

Daniel's upper room is an open space on your rooftop - in face in this very syngauge where we worship Middle there is a sunlight window that serves this purpose of an upper room.... To face God; to face home.

Daniel chooses their body as a means to show to the world on their upper room...I'm here...I'm queer... I'm trans...and I will worship my God and I will love deeper in spite of this world's asks of me to change.

The upper room for us can be many things... our private bedrooms, our spaces where we dance and make out, our sex lives, our bodies, our clothes.... Anything that mirrors the image of God into the public sphere is the upper room ...

Daniel, despite knowing the danger of ritualized prayer in the upper room - continues to show their full selves to God and everyone.

Daniel's choice is an invitation to us Middle. What is our upper room? Where do we go to be held and reminded who we are? How do we mirror to ourselves and others this movement of love and justice?

Our bodies are sacred and serve as a moving upper room to subvert this fractured idea of what being human must be toward an ethic of what being human is and loving one another fiercely in that humanity.

I invite you to spend time this week asking yourself what that space is for you? How you can find center in your own personhood to remember how divine and holy you are despite the

world's conditions. May we take a posture of Daniel moments before the Lions Den...may we say a bold no on top of our personal rooftops to fascist mentalities and a bold yes to the mirror's reflection of the bodies we host our love in and send it outward.

May it be so.