

[Story] A missionary recruit goes to Venezuela for the first time, struggling with the language. He visits one of the local churches and sits in the front row. So as not to make a fool of himself, he decides to pick someone out of the crowd to imitate. He decides to follow the man sitting next to him in the front pew. As they sing, the man claps his hands, so the missionary recruit claps, too. When the man stands up to pray, the missionary recruit stands up, too. When the man sits down, the missionary sits down. Later in the service, the man next to him stands up again, so the missionary stands up, too. Suddenly a hush falls over the entire congregation. A few people gasp. The missionary looks around and sees that no one else is standing. So, he sits down. After the service ends, the missionary recruit greets the preacher. “I see that you don’t speak Spanish,” the preacher says. The missionary replies, “No, I don’t. Was it that obvious?” “Well yes,” the preacher says. “I announced that the Acosta family had a new-born baby boy, and I asked the proud father to stand up.”

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Have you ever had an experience following the crowd just because everyone else is doing it and later on you realized that it was not the right thing to do? I have. Came to American when I was 15 and started the school without knowing the American culture, I often fell into a trap of doing things what others did and later realized it was not the right thing to do. For example, people at school often used the word, “s-h-i-t” in conversation. I looked up the dictionary to see the definition of the word and its uses. I tried to imitate others for a while for using this popular word but did not feel right. So, I asked people to explain the reason to choose this word whenever they used it and help me to use this word in a correct way. Some people to whom I asked became my friends and they replaced this word, “s-h-i-t,” with other words like “sugar” or “honey.” Other folks disappeared from my life.

It should be obvious to anyone that we are not to do wrong, but today’s scripture singles out doing wrong by following a crowd. Why? Because it is often so much easier to do wrong when we are in a crowd than when we are alone. For in a crowd there is often a real pressure to do what they do or risk being subject to ridicule, or worse, actual physical attack in the case of political uprisings and mob mentality or riots.

During the 2020 presidential campaign and also after the 2020 election day, two vivid crowds have been formed in our country, doing the “tug of war” in everywhere. Some churches are sucked into this political “tug of war” and I have been pressured by people heavily in that regard. So, today I would like to take an opportunity to clear the air. There is no room for any “political tug of war” at Kona United Methodist Church, especially in the ministry of worship.

If you are the followers of “Trump” crowd, so be it but be kind to others. If you are the followers of “Biden” crowd, so be it but also be kind to others. Kindness matters. We, the People of Kona United Methodist Church, follow neither the “Trump” crowd nor “Biden” crowd as a church. If you want to praise Trump or Biden, do it at other places but not at Kona United Methodist Church. We only follow Jesus Christ who is our Lord and Savior. He is the only one to be praised and worshipped at Kona United Methodist Church. There is no room for Trump or Biden or anyone else to be praised in our worship, but only Jesus Christ. We get together to worship our Lord Jesus Christ alone, not anyone else or anything else.

Scripture is clear: Whatever the risks, we are not to go along with the crowd in doing wrong. Worshiping other than our God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is wrong. I will do whatever I can in my power, on behalf of our church, to protect our worship to be the worship of our awesome God.

This is what Daniel did in the Bible. He was a Hebrew teenager who was brought out of Judah into Babylon to be trained to serve the king. But the Babylonians had all these customs that didn’t agree with the Jewish faith. They worshiped many different gods and they wanted Daniel to fit in and worship their gods.

The first thing they did was change his name from Daniel, which means “God is my judge,” to Belteshazzar, which means “Worshiper of Baal.” They wanted him to forget about the God of Israel and start worshiping their idols. Daniel could have accepted it and thought, “This is what everybody’s doing. I’m in their nation. I’m surrounded by people that worship idols. I’ll just fit in, go with the flow.”

But Daniel didn’t let them squeeze him into their mold. He knew he had been set apart, that he wasn’t supposed to follow the crowd in doing wrong. The Babylonians pressured Daniel to compromise and change, but the scripture says: “Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to him by the king” (Daniel 1:8). He was saying, in effect: “Everyone around me may

be compromising. They're taking the easy way out, but I am not going to lower my standards. I'm not going to fit in and become common. I'm going to live by a higher standard."

When the person in charge saw how determined he was, he said he would give Daniel ten days to eat his own food, then they would see how he was doing. After those ten days, Daniel came out stronger and healthier than all the other young men that had been eating the king's food.

Not only that, Darius, the king of Babylon, decreed that everyone in the kingdom should bow down only to him. Daniel, though, refused to bow before anyone but God. When he heard the decree, he went instead to his room and prayed. Daniel's enemies were outside listening, hoping to catch him disobeying the king's orders. When they heard him praying, they reported him to Darius, who had him thrown into a den of lions. But God protected Daniel. He kept the lions from doing Daniel any harm. When Darius came to check on Daniel the next day, he was astonished to find him alive! The king put Daniel in charge of all of Babylon. Daniel went from being a slave to being the leader of the whole country.

When we decide not to follow the crowd in doing wrong, like Daniel, we will see uncommon favor. God will make things happen that we couldn't make happen. But it takes courage to be different and be who we are, the children of God. Take courage, my friends! People will try to make you feel weak because you're not going with the majority, because you don't party with everyone, because you don't gossip, because you don't play politics. The truth is you're not weak; you're strong. It doesn't take much effort to do what everyone else is doing. A dead fish can float downstream; it takes a live one to swim upstream.

Friends! We are not to follow the crowd in doing wrong—and most of the time we are not to follow the crowd at all, even in seemingly harmless. Put your “thinking-cap” on, and think, pray, and discern the lead of the Holy Spirit and follow Him, not the crowd.

When others shrink back, have uncommon faith in Christ Jesus. When others slack off, have uncommon commitment in Christ Jesus. When others take the easy way out, have uncommon excellence in Christ Jesus. If we will do this, I believe and declare we're going to see uncommon favor of God, uncommon breakthroughs, and uncommon victories in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Let it be so to us today. Amen.