

6.23.24

Sermon Series: Stories Around the Campfire

God's Word: Psalm 27 NLT

Scripture: Daniel 3:13-27 NLT

"Faith Under Fire"

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Daniel 3:13-27 NLT

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? ¹⁵ I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments.^[a] But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. ¹⁸ But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

¹⁹ Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. ²⁰ Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. ²² And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. ²³ So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames.

²⁴ But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did," they replied.

²⁵ "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god^[b]!"

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

So, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. ²⁷ Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke!

This past week at the dinner table Silas was talking about playing a game on the kids shared cellphone and told us of a pop-up that said he had a chance to win a \$1000 gift card to amazon. Pamm and I looked at each other with concern in our faces as Silas continued to tell us that he filled out the online form. We started to talk about scams and

how giving out your information is not a good idea. Silas quickly said not to worry because he didn't use his real name, no, he in fact had come up with pseudonym: Simon Illinois. At that moment our whole family busted out laughing, Simon Illinois. After much belly laughter, we asked how he came up with that name and he said it sounded like a Superhero.

As we look at this familiar Sunday School story of the fiery furnace: Did you know that King Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of Daniel and those in the furnace well before this time. Yes, we see this in chapter 1 of Daniel. Daniel was called Beltshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego. The names here mean something, unlike Simon Illinois. "This change in names is quite significant as names not only signify one's identity and heritage, but in the case of these particular names, also one's religious beliefs. So, all three the original names of these Jewish men contain references to God such as "God is gracious" in the case of Hananiah, "Who is like God?" in the case of Mishael, and "God keeps him" in the case of Azariah.

These references to the God of Israel have now been substituted with references to the Babylonian gods, such as Nebo — Abednego means "servant of Nebo." The Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar were trying to remove all references to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Yahweh.

And we see this come to a head in our passage today. King Nebuchadnezzar is trying to deify himself by placing a large statue of himself to be worshipped. In his pride and thirst for power, Ole King Neb decrees that everyone should worship his statue and if they don't there will be dire consequences. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse and it throws the king into a rage. So much so that it says his face contorted to appear differently than normal. He was so hot that he ordered the furnace to be made seven times hotter than usual to make sure his fiery anger was satisfied.

As we have heard, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego still refuse and are thrown into this hotter than hot furnace. Yet, to the amazement of all watching and to the men themselves, God delivers them from the flames. Even more, as King Neb investigates the flames, he sees another in the fire with the men and calls them out in amazement as they don't even smell like smoke. There is a shift in Neb's aspirations as he recognizes that he is not a god, but the Most High God just delivered these men from the fire.

How do Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego survive? They survive because God saves them. They survived because they had relentless trust in God to protect and save them. They held on to the hope in their and our God of deliverance and salvation. At conference one of our speakers was Bishop Lanette Plambeck. Bishop Plambeck shared with us the Hebrew word Tikvah. Tikvah meaning a relentless hope but also a tangible hope. This word comes from the story of Rahab where she puts out a red cord for her and her family to be saved from the raiding forces. The cord stuck out the widow of the city walls was the means of salvation but also the hope for her family's survival. This is the kind of hope that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had in God.

When being sentenced to the fiery furnace, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego help onto the hope in Yahweh. Their hope was tied the concept of waiting and expecting God to do something. They said, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God

whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up." They resigned themselves to hope and trust in God. They pinned their hopes on their faith and hope being justified. They don't believe in the idols or other gods, but in the one true God. This is the God whom they have this Tikvah, tangible hope in God who can deliver them. That even if they were burned up in the flames God would be faithful to them. What faith and what hope!

It wasn't until Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego committed to the civil disobedience, of being thrown in the fire, that their faith was justified. This isn't some formula we are to follow though, like an if we hope and trust in God then God will act. Often our way of doing things is, "if you show me that I'll win then I'll risk it." That's not how God works. When we, of in this case the three guys, decide to go God's way that's when God stands beside us to strengthen and comfort us. This is when there was another in the fire with them. It is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's unseen power (hope and faith in things unseen) that upsets the plans of Nebuchadnezzar. The reality of the unseen companion in the fire, whether it was an angel, Christ, or God) is never doubted. Faith by those who go God's way is usually not justified or revealed until the decision has been made to endure whatever sacrifice or commitment God asks and demands. Once they are in the fire, the angel appears and saves them.

We see God's hand as we look back and recognize God's hand and move forward with the assurance that God is with us. Looking back, we realize it was not Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who did anything to save themselves besides hope and trust in the One that could save them. And it is God's action that changes, somewhat, Nebuchadnezzar's heart when it comes to God. This story is about a God who fulfills God's promises to deliver God's people. That God is always there no matter the circumstances- in good times and bad times- including those times being thrown into a fiery furnace.

Friends, no matter the circumstances of our lives God is there. I charge you to hold onto the Tikvah of God's promises. Have faith God will redeem and save us from whatever furnace we are in and have gone through. Hold onto the tangible promise that God is working everything out for the good of those who love God and are called according to God's purposes. 1 Corinthians 13 says, "Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance...our knowledge (of things now and things to come) is partial, incomplete, and mostly useless. But someday and sometime, we will see everything with perfect clarity...then we will know everything completely, just as God knows us completely. Yet, these things will last forever- faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these things is love. Let us hold fast to these things knowing that God is faithful, God is there, and God is for us! Amen.

