

Reformation Sunday  
October 27, 2024  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
Live as Courageous Witnesses  
Daniel 3:16-28 (EHV)

*Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar, "We have no need to answer you about this matter. <sup>17</sup>Since our God, whom we serve, does exist, he is able to save us from the blazing fiery furnace. So, he may save us from your hand, Your Majesty. <sup>18</sup>But if he does not, you should know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods, and we will not worship the golden statue that you set up."*

*<sup>19</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and the expression on his face changed against Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego. He said to heat the furnace seven times hotter than it was usually heated. <sup>20</sup>He ordered some men, who were soldiers from his army, to bind Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego in order to throw them into the blazing fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup>So these men were bound in their coats, their pants, their turbans, and their other clothing, and they were thrown into the middle of the blazing fiery furnace. <sup>22</sup>Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace was extremely hot, those men who carried Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego were killed by the intense heat of the fire. <sup>23</sup>But these three men, Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego, who had been tied up, fell into the blazing fiery furnace.*

*<sup>24</sup>Then King Nebuchadnezzar was startled and immediately stood up. He said to his advisors, "Didn't we throw three men, who had been tied up, into the middle of the fire?"*

*They answered the king, "Certainly, Your Majesty."*

*<sup>25</sup>He said, "Look! I see four men, who are untied and walking around in the middle of the fire, unharmed. What is more, the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."*

*<sup>26</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar approached the door of the blazing fiery furnace. He said, "Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out!" Then Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego came out from the middle of the furnace. <sup>27</sup>The satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the royal advisors gathered together and looked at these men. The fire had no power over their bodies. Not a hair on their head was singed, their robes were not damaged, and the smell of fire had not stuck to them.*

*<sup>28</sup>Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego, who sent his angel and saved his servants, who trusted in God and ignored the king's command. They gave up their bodies and did not pay homage or worship any god except their God."*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Happy Reformation Sunday! Today we thank the Lord for restoring the truth of the gospel through the reformers some 500 years ago. We thank the Lord that we have these wonderful and comforting Reformation truths, that we are saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and God tells us all of these truths through Scripture alone.

When Martin Luther began to study and teach the Scriptures, he discovered that his church was not teaching that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He was set free by the Scripture's clear teaching on this and wanted everyone to know the same comfort he had received through the gospel. The leaders of the church and the rulers in society were not all that excited about reforming the teachings of the church to match Scripture. They saw Martin Luther as a troublesome monk from a small town and they decided to bring him into line. In 1521 Luther was called to appear before the Holy Roman Emperor, the princes, the electors of the Empire, and leaders of the church. They had many important things to discuss about wars and the defense of Europe from Muslim invasion. They thought they could shut down Luther quickly

before such an imposing group of the most powerful men in Europe. Luther was given the option to recant what he had written. Death was the likely and expected result if he did not recant. After a night of prayer and consideration, Luther refused to turn aside from the truth that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He would not recant even knowing the likely suffering and death he would face.

We marvel at people in history who stand up to those in power and refuse to be swayed by that power. Luther is but one example of Christians who have done this. John Hus did so a century before Luther and was burned at the stake. The early Christians refused to worship the Roman emperor and refused to deny Christ. They were thrown to the wild animals, burned and crucified. Yet they would not turn from Christ. Today, we look back 600 years before Christ and over 2,000 years before Luther to see three men who held onto faith in the Lord even when threatened by the mighty Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. How do these believers in history hold onto faith in Christ in such terrible situations? Will we hold onto Christ if we face such pressure to deny Christ? The true account of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (aka, Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego) give us some answers and hope as we live as courageous witnesses for Christ today.

Nebuchadnezzar built a golden statue that reached 90 feet into the air. He demanded that all of his officials and people show their loyalty to this idol and therefore to Nebuchadnezzar by bowing down to the statue when the music began. The punishment for refusing to bow at the appropriate time was death in a fiery furnace. The three Hebrew young men would not bow down. Nebuchadnezzar has a problem now. Shadrak, Meshak and Abednego were good servants of the king. In chapter 1 we hear, "In every matter concerning wisdom and understanding that the king sought from them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and spell casters in his entire kingdom." (1:20). The king would not want to kill off his best advisors. But he also could not allow any hint of rebellion from any official, much less some Hebrew captives from Jerusalem. He gives the three one more chance to bow down.

They answer the king: *"We have no need to answer you about this matter. <sup>17</sup>Since our God, whom we serve, does exist, he is able to save us from the blazing fiery furnace. So, he may save us from your hand, Your Majesty <sup>18</sup>But if he does not, you should know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods, and we will not worship the golden statue that you set up."*

We know the rest of the story. God rescues them! But they did not know what the Lord would do. They only knew what Nebuchadnezzar would do. He did not make idle threats. He would throw them into the furnace if they did not bow down. God might save them from a fiery death, or he might not. No matter what happens, these three believers will not bow down to other gods. Amazing faith on display!

Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego are really depending on the grace of God alone. They do not demand that God rescue them from the evil king because they are such good believers. They do not say that God will rescue them because of what they've done in the past. They do not believe that God will rescue them because of their faith in the Lord. They trust in the mercy of God, the wisdom of God, the grace of God – that the true God will do what is best for them. Their God has promised a Savior who would be born of a woman to crush Satan for them (Gen 3). Their God promised a Savior who would be a descendant of Abraham and bless all nations (Gen 12,15). Their God promised them a Savior who would be in the line of King David and rule forever and ever (2 Sam 7). Their God promised them a Savior who would be stricken, smitten, and afflicted to bring them peace with God (Is 53). Their God promised to forgive their guilt and remember their sins no more (Jer 31:31). And you think they are going to bow down to a statue?!

They are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in the Savior God promised them alone. The promises of God revealed in the truths of Scripture alone are what enable us to be courageous witnesses when tempted to bow down to the false gods of this world. The glitter of gold will tempt us to bow down to money and wealth in this life. But no amount of gold, no amount of

wealth will ever crush the devil. Only Jesus has done that for us. Popular culture and popularity may tempt us to fit in, not only by wearing the right clothes, but also by believing the accepted version of Christianity. The world accepts the version of Christianity that says the story of the three men in the fiery furnace is fictional along with many other parts of the Bible. You can pick and choose what to believe. But fitting in with the ideas of our culture does not bless all nations. Only Jesus blesses all nations by the atoning sacrifice of himself on the cross. We may be tempted to bow down to ourselves. After all, we are the good people in society. We do the right thing, raise our kids to do the right thing, and are a general positive in our neighborhoods. But being the good people in society does not bring us peace with God. Only Jesus does that through his perfect life and innocent death. And there is no one else who forgives our guilt and remembers our sins no more except the one, true, Triune God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego trusted the Lord to forgive them and save them eternally. The Lord decided to also rescue them from the fiery furnace. The furnace was made seven times hotter than normal. The soldiers who threw them in died from the heat. But God sent his angel to walk in the fire with them. When Nebuchadnezzar called for them to come out of the fire, the account continues with these amazing words:

*Then Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego came out from the middle of the furnace. <sup>27</sup>The satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the royal advisors gathered together and looked at these men. The fire had no power over their bodies. Not a hair on their head was singed, their robes were not damaged, and the smell of fire had not stuck to them.*

Guys, you know what happens when your hand gets a little too close to the grill. The little hairs get a little singed. Everyone knows that you are going to smell like smoke if you stand around a bonfire. But our Savior God saves completely. Not one hair singed on the three men. Not one fiber of clothing burned. Not even the smell of smoke on them.

Dear fellow believers in Christ. That is how God sees you now and how you will be forever in his presence. By his grace alone, Christ took our place under the wrath of God to pay for every sin upon the cross. By his grace alone, God clothes us in the robe of Christ's righteousness so that no stain or wrinkle or any other blemish of sin can be seen. No whiff of sin remains on those who Christ has cleansed. No guilt remains on those for whom Christ has forgiven. Not one hair on our head has to be sacrificed to pay for our sins. Christ gladly and freely paid for all sin by his sacrifice.

The world will continue to build taller and more impressive statues but whatever the world offers is rubbish compared to what Christ has done for us. The world will continue to threaten those who follow Christ alone. But no threat can actually take away what Christ has done for us. So how can we be like Shadrack, Meshak, and Abednego? Know the gracious promises of God for you and how he has kept his promises of grace through Christ alone. Nothing else compares. Luther sums it up for us in the fourth stanza of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

*The Word they still shall let remain nor any thanks have for it;  
He's by our side upon the plain with his good gifts and Spirit.  
And take they our life, good, fame, child, and wife,  
Though all may be gone, our victory is won;  
The kingdom's ours forever! (CW 863:4)*

Amen.