**Waiting For The Lord: To Bring Through Fire**

**Daniel 3:1-30**

6th Mid-Lent – 04.06.2022

[base sermon by Dean Suehring]

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Continuing our homiletic mid-week Lenten theme by looking at the Old Testament readings from the Easter Vigil and;***Waiting for the Lord: Joining the Old Testament Saints in Vigil***. Today, we are Waiting for the Lord: ***To Bring Through Fire.***

What King Nebuchadnezzar wanted was very simple. Whenever anyone heard music, they were to fall down and worship the image of gold that he had made. If you didn’t, you would be thrown into a burning fiery furnace. It was a classic case of “join us or die.”

When the time came, when the wicked king had gathered to himself all the officials, all the influential people and government leaders, and the orchestra played, all the people fell to their knees. Some perhaps because they believed what Nebuchadnezzar believed and desired to worship the golden image he had made. Some perhaps went along with the whole thing because they wanted to keep their positions and jobs. Others did as they were told simply to save their own skin – they wanted to stay alive!

Yet in the face of such tyranny, while everyone else bent the knee and went along with the king’s idolatry, three men remained standing: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who had given the task to handle the affairs of the province of Babylon.

I imagine their hearts were pounding. I am sure that in the nearby crowd with them were friends, co-workers, perhaps even family members telling them to get down. “What are you doing?” “Why are still standing up?” was probably the chorus that likely accompanied the playing of all the musical instruments. Surely these men were tempted to fall into line, to act as though they had not heard the music at first but now would comply, or to pretend that it was taking them just a little longer than the rest to fall down and worship the king and his golden statue.

It would have been easy to give in, to fall down and worship. Maybe they could tell themselves they could do more in the long run by staying in power and good favor with the king, than being burnt to a crisp. They did not do so. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, realized that the goal of life is not to stay alive, but to glorify God. That is what they did. While the rest of the crowd knelt, they stood.

Certain tattle-tales, busy-bodies, gossips, certain Chaldeans went to Nebuchadnezzar and told them about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednegos’ disobedience. In a furious rage, the king sent to have them brought before him.

Even when faced with the king’s furious rage, and given an opportunity to show their obedience to the command, they considered it more important to obey and be faithful to God rather than men. They feared, loved and trust in the Lord more than people, even their own countrymen and family members. And the longer they stood, the bolder the Holy Spirit made them.

They replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

God will deliver us – BUT IF NOT… They were going to do the right thing, even if God chose to let them suffer for it. If they were to die a horrific death rather than deny their God – so be it! These men are examples of faith for us.

Our plight may not be exactly the same as theirs, for we are not being asked to bow down before some huge statue of gold, but our situation is not much different. All Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to do was fall down and they would have been fine. It did not matter if they believed everything Nebuchadnezzar believed, so long as they did not oppose him. They were not asked to believe, just bow down with the others. If they had simply done that, they would have been fine.

Which gods hold sway in our day? The spirit of this age, our world and culture say, “You don’t need to be *for* abortion or sodomy or gender fluidity or living together without the benefit of marriage [*or \_\_\_\_\_*], just don’t speak out against them, do that and all will be fine.”

***EXCEPT*** God’s word has something to say about every one of these things and all manner of sin, namely that we may not do them.

Jesus talks about being dragged before governors and kings (Matt. 10:18), but before you get there (which you likely never will) what about confessing the truth of God’s word to your neighbors, your friends, your children and grandchildren?

Whom do you fear more, them or God? That is our trial by fire.

Repent, dear Christians! The three men in Daniel were not afraid of a king – not even of a fiery furnace. And you promised to do the same. Twice! On the day you were confirmed, you were asked, “Do you promise to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even to death? Then you were asked. Do you promise to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” To both of those questions put before you, you answered, “I do, by the grace of God.”

God willing, you will never have to face a death so horrible as the one that threatened Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.***But* you can be sure** that if you take the faith and the word of God seriously – you will eventually find yourself at odds with the world. And, that is going to include people that you know.

Eventually there comes a time when you have to stand up and say, “No! This is not right.” Your opponents – and yes they are opponents when they expect you to stand against God and His Word – whoever they are, like Nebuchadnezzar will appeal to their power or point of view.

In essence, they will ask you to bow to their false go. They will ask you on whose authority you say something is holy or sin, right or wrong, and like the three men of great faith in our text [*for tonight*] you need only point them to the word of God. And when you speak That Word, know that it is not you but the Spirit who is speaking through you. For the strength to be bold and faithful is yours only by the grace of God.

Christ is the author and perfecter of faith, and apart from him you can do nothing. He calls you to be faithful and He is the one who makes you faithful. Though you have not been perfect, He is! His death on the cross counts for you. Your sins are forgiven. Do not worry about the past, what you could have or should have done Jesus has taken care of that. His blood was shed for you. In him you are forgiven, and from him comes the strength to be bold and be faithful.

That is why Christ invites you to gather as His beloved saints – to hear His word and receive His sacraments. By these means of His grace, not only are your sins forgiven and faith increased, but by these you also learn the wisdom, the beauty, and the truth that God declares in His word. By these miracles of His grace, you grow to love Christ better and trust Him more fully.

None of us has had to endure as had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – thank the Lord God for that. Yet, the trials we face are real. By faith we know that if God is for us, who can be against us. At the same time, it is only too apparent that the world and Satan do tempt us to fall down and give up. Our sinful flesh wants to take the easy path instead of the narrow one that leads to heaven. Do not try to go it alone.

Christ was with those men in the furnace that day, and because of that not a hair on their heads was singed. In fact, coming out of the fire they did not even smell of fire, the fire had no power over them. While we may not enjoy such a miracle in this life, we will on the Last Day. On that day our Lord will awaken us to everlasting life as He has promised.

Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego we know that we are in God’s hands, and like those saints before us we trust that he will deliver us from all our foes – He will bring us through the fiery trials of this life, for He has promised to so. If not in this life, certainly in the life to come. In the name of Jesus. Amen.