

Sermon followed by Service

June 23, 2024

Daniel 3

“Everyone else is doing it. Why do we have to be different?”
“Everyone else is doing it. Why can’t we join in?” “Everyone else is doing it. Why create a stir? Why make trouble for ourselves.” “Everyone else is doing it. Why not us? God will understand.”

“God will understand if I join in.” I imagine he will. God understood what Cain was thinking before he killed Abel. God understood what the world was doing before he sent the flood. God understood what Sodom and Gomorrah were doing before the sky stormed with fire and brimstone. As we heard in early June, God understood what Israel was doing before he kicked them out of the house. And God understood what Jerusalem was doing before he tore their house down. Yes, absolutely God understands. He understands temptation, every temptation you and I face. He understands what our sinful nature is looking for. He understands what the world has to offer and why we want to join the world. And he understands what the world can’t offer. He understands what we can’t find, what we can’t get from the world. And he knows what we do to ourselves, what we do to those around us, when we don’t get what we want out of life in the world. That’s just one reason why, even though God understands, God doesn’t approve. God doesn’t approve when we join the world in its sin. God doesn’t approve when we join the rest of the world in blowing off and laughing off God’s way of life and love. Even though God understands, God doesn’t approve. And that, my friends, is a bit of an understatement. Hell is full of people who thought: “Everybody else is doing it; why not us?” And I wouldn’t be surprised if hell had a special room full of people who thought: “I thought God would understand.”

We want, we need more than a God who understands the draw of sin, the want to fit in. We need more than a God who understands us; we need a God who will stand with us. And that’s the God we see in our lesson.

What’s your favorite promise of God standing with you in the face of trouble?

In our lesson, put yourself in the place of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar - King of the Babylonian Empire, an empire stretching from India to Egypt, an empire that covers almost all the mid-East - that King Nebuchadnezzar orders you to bow down, to declare your allegiance to him and his gods. He's made it clear: if you don't bow down, you're against him and you will be thrown alive into a blazing, fiery furnace to be cooked dead. You know he's not bluffing. You know family, friends, neighbors he's had killed. And Nebuchadnezzar had you torn out of your home and marched hundreds of miles to do what he says. Today he says: "bow down." So what do you do? Everyone around you bows down. They're not going to help you; they're not going to stand up for you. They're looking out for themselves. So what do you do? Do you stand out from everybody else and stand up with God? Or do you go along to get along and live to see another day?

When are you expected to go along to get along?

For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - going along, getting along, fitting in with the world was out of the question. For them, the question wasn't - how do we get ahead in this world? For them the question was - how do we show we stand with God in this world? And their answer? It doesn't matter what anybody promises us or how they threaten us, it doesn't matter what the rest of the world does, it doesn't even matter what God does - we stand with God!

So, what happened? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood with God. And God stood with them. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace, they weren't burnt up; they stood up. And a fourth figure stood with them. Was it an angel? Was it God himself? We don't know. Either way, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood with God, God stood with them.

When we stand with God, God stands with us. Does that mean that when we stand with God instead of fitting in with the world, we can expect to stay standing burn-free, pain-free, without a scratch? No, and yes! The shields of the apostles who were killed for their faith remind us that our stand with Jesus will not always be pain-free. But when we stand with Jesus instead of fitting in with the world, we get to look forward to something better than fitting in and getting ahead in this world. When we stand with Jesus, we get to look forward to Jesus standing up for us when we meet God in heaven. Instead of you and me fitting in with the rest of the world and being sent away with the rest of the world, Jesus will open his arms and say: "You belong with me." Instead of you and me being judged and cursed and thrown into the fiery furnace with the world, the Jesus who was nailed to the cross, the Jesus who took your sin and mine, the Jesus who shouted: "It is finished!" - that Jesus will say to you: "You are forgiven and right by me." Yes, the Jesus who stood up for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, will stand up for you. We don't have to live to fit in with the world; we get to live for someone, for something better. We get to stand with God; we get to live for heaven! Amen.

What's your favorite moment, your favorite miracle in that lesson? Was it Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepping out of the furnace - no burns, no hair singed, not even the smell of fire and smoke? Was it when Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace and didn't see three, but four, and the fourth looking like a son of the gods, and they're all walking about in the midst of the fire? Was it when Nebuchadnezzar said those nice things about God? All of those get us cheering - "Glory to God in the highest!" I think this might be my favorite moment, my favorite miracle - when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down: "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Why do I call that a miracle? That's God at work. Why do I call that my favorite moment, my favorite miracle? God promises to work that same kind of miracle in us. Not only does God promise that as we stand with him, he will stand with us. But God also promises that as we grow in knowing him, he will make us strong. And as we grow together with God and each other, and as we stand together through thick and thin, he will make us strong together. Strong in the face of evil. Strong to stand with God. Strong to support each other with God. Strong to be delivered by God.

That's why I passed out that Bible Study survey last week. That's why I'm asking you how we can study together, how we can grow together. I'm not just looking to fill up my calendar. I'm looking for how we will take advantage of God's power and promise. I'm looking for how we will help each other to be

strong in his power and promise. And studying God's Word together is God's way to make us strong in his power and promise.

You may be thinking, "but I'm already reading and studying on my own." Great! Wonderful! Keep it up! Show me how - 10 people, 100 people, 1000 people - reading the Bible on their own fulfills God's plan and vision for a people filling each other up, a people making each other strong in God's power and promise.

God has a better plan and vision for us than each of us standing or studying alone before the world. God has a better plan and vision for us than each of us standing and studying alone with him. God calls us to stand and study together - and he will make us strong together. Amen.

June 22 & 23, 2024

SERVICE OF THE WORD

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see three young men thrown into the fiery furnace for standing up to the most powerful king in the world. But they aren't alone! And neither are we!

OPENING HYMN

"How Firm a Foundation"

Hymn 800

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed,
for I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

"When through the deep waters I call you to go,
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow,
for I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.

"When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
my grace all-sufficient shall be your supply;
the flames will not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not, desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

INVOCATION

M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

+ CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

M: We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.

C: **Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**

M: God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will. **Amen.**

+ PRAYER AND PRAISE +

M: In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord.

HYMN (No Introduction) - Sung

“O Taste and See”

O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessèd are they who take refuge in him.

Your Word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

Your faithfulness continues forever. O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessèd are they who take refuge in him.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord our God, so govern the nations on earth and direct the affairs of this world that your church may worship you in peace and joy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Daniel 3:16–28

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”

They replied, “Certainly, Your Majesty.”

He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them.

They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 2D

Refrain



Great are the works of the LORD. Al-le - lu - ia! Al-le - lu - ia! Great are the works of the LORD.

Tone



Why do the nations / conspire
and the peoples / plot in vain?

The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together a- /
gainst the LORD
and against his A- / nointed. *Refrain*

The One enthroned in / heaven laughs;
the Lord / scoffs at them.

He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, / saying,
"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy / mountain." *Refrain*

I will proclaim the / LORD's decree:

He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your / Father."

Glory be to the Father and / to the Son

and to the Holy / Spirit,

as it was in the be- / ginning,

is now, and will be forever. / Amen. Refrain

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 16:33

Alleluia. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Mark 13:9-13

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY

"By Faith"

Hymn 868

By faith we see the hand of God in the light of creation's grand design,
in the lives of those who prove his faithfulness,
who walk by faith and not by sight. (v. 2)

By faith our fathers roamed the earth
with the pow'r of his promise in their hearts,
of a holy city built by God's own hand,
a place where peace and justice reign.

Refrain

We will stand as children of the promise;
we will fix our eyes on him, our soul's reward.
Till the race is finished and the work is done,
we'll walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith the prophets saw a day
when the longed-for Messiah would appear
with the pow'r to break the chains of sin and death
and rise triumphant from the grave. (v. 4)

By faith the church was called to go in the pow'r of the Spirit to the lost
to deliver captives and to preach good news
in ev'ry corner of the earth. *Refrain*

By faith this mountain shall be moved
and the pow'r of the gospel shall prevail,
for we know in Christ all things are possible
for all who call upon his name. *Refrain*

HYMN

“If God Himself Be for Me”
Hymn 819 vs. 1, 2, 6, & 7

If God himself be for me, I may a host defy;
for when I pray, before me my foes, confounded, fly.
If Christ, my head and master, befriend me from above,
what foe or what disaster can drive me from his love?

This I believe, yea rather, of this I make my boast,
that God is my dear Father, the friend who loves me most,
and that, whate’er betide me, my Savior is at hand
thro’ stormy seas to guide me and bring me safe to land.

No danger, thirst, or hunger, no pain or poverty,
no earthly tyrant’s anger shall ever vanquish me.
Though earth should break asunder, you are my Savior true;
no fire or sword or thunder shall sever me from you.

My heart for joy is springing and can no more be sad;
my soul is filled with singing, sees only sunshine glad.
The sun that cheers my spirit is Jesus Christ, my King;
the heav’n I shall inherit makes me rejoice and sing.

OFFERING

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PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: Lord God, our maker and preserver, we praise and thank you for all that you give us day after day.

C: We are not worthy of all the mercies you show us.

M: You have given us your precious Word to nourish our souls and to protect us from the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.

C: We thank you for those who teach and preach your saving truth at this place and everywhere. Grant them a rich measure of patience, wisdom, and love.

M: Heavenly Father, we pray that you shield us from every kind of danger: sudden catastrophe, terrors of crime, and the pain of disease. Watch over those who travel by land, sea, and air. Keep our loved ones from whatever perils may threaten them.

C: Heal those who are sick, cheer those who are sad, calm those who are distressed, and comfort all who are old and infirm.

M: Bless our land, our people, and those who hold offices of high trust. Keep our government and schools upright and strong for the advancement of good citizenship and useful vocations, that we may enjoy your gifts of peace, security, and well-being.

C: Grant your blessing to every nation on earth. Where there are wars, may there be peace. Where there is hatred, let it be healed. Where there is poverty, danger, or disaster, come with your almighty power to help and restore.

Special prayers and intercessions may follow.

M: Hear us, Lord, as we bring to you our private petitions.

Silent prayer.

- M: We bring these requests before you in the name of Jesus our Lord, and ask you to hear us. Take all that we have, our bodies and minds, our time and skills, our ministries and offerings, and use them to your glory.
- C: **We give ourselves to you that we may serve you in whatever way is pleasing in your sight. Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

- M: O Lord God, our heavenly Father, pour out the Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep us strong in your grace and truth, protect and comfort us in all temptation, and bestow on us your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

- M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another. Serve the Lord with gladness.
- The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word”

Hymn 862

Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word; curb those who by deceit or sword
would seek to overthrow your Son and to destroy what he has done.

Lord Jesus Christ, your pow’r make known, for you are Lord of lords alone;
defend your Christendom that we may sing your praise eternally.

O Comforter of priceless worth, send peace and unity on earth;
support us in our final strife and lead us out of death to life.

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2023 WELS STATISTICAL SUMMARY

Rev. Jonathan Hein, WELS Congregational Services coordinator, serves as the guest writer for President Schroeder's Together column this week.

Each year, WELS collects data from all congregations and schools. WELS Congregational Services compiles this data into a comprehensive statistical report and publishes a statistical summary and analysis.

The 2023 statistical summary shares some good news for which we give thanks to God. Last year, even though WELS total membership declined by about 5,300 (-1.6 percent), the number of WELS members participating in in-person weekly worship increased by almost 8,000 (+6.7 percent). Adult Bible study and Sunday school also saw large increases in participation. 2023 also saw WELS congregations blessed with almost 5,800 adult spiritual gains, the highest total in over a decade.

The statistical analysis for 2023 also digs into the shortage of called workers. In 2023, WELS congregations reported having 264,500 communicant members, a decline of almost 17 percent from the statistical high year of 1990. Yet, WELS has 46 percent more teachers today than in 1990 (about 970 total) and almost the exact same number of active pastors today as in 1990. So, the reality is WELS has more called workers active today than at any point in WELS history. So how can there be a high vacancy rate? The Lord has simply increased the gospel opportunities before us: to grow our local ministries (particularly school expansion), to start new congregations around the country, and to plant new outreach locations around the world.

The statistical analysis discusses the importance of strengthening our efforts to recruit people for gospel ministry as well as creating new pipelines by which one can enter ministry. It also reviews the growing challenge of those efforts in light of the fact that the need for called workers is growing at approximately 2 percent annually at the same time WELS membership is declining at approximately 1.3 percent annually.

You can find the WELS 2023 Statistical Summary and Analysis at welscongregationalservices.net/stats.

The Roles God Gives Us

From *Compassion* - Institutional Ministries Newsletter

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are ministers through whom you believed, and each served as the Lord gave him his role. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but it is God who causes the growth. (EHV 1 Cor. 3:5-7).

One of the things I've always appreciated and found quite interesting about our ministry is the way in which *God assigns various roles to all of us* in order to lead people into His Word. But as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians, it's not about the preacher or teacher, the volunteer or called worker, we are all simply carrying out the role God has given us. Sometimes we plant, sometimes we water, but as Paul says, God is always the one working behind the scenes through the power of His Word to bring people to faith and then nurture them in that faith.

Over the course of a few weeks, God brought four new men to my weekly Bible study at the prison. The first was a referral from one of my fellow chaplains alerting me to someone who was recently transferred to the prison where I serve. The second and third both started attending when they were invited by someone on their unit who was already coming to my class. The fourth man however, found his way to my class a little differently.

Prior to his incarceration, the young man had begun attending one of our churches. After he went to prison, the pastor from that church remained in contact with him, sending him sermons every week. The pastor also reached out to us via the website. We conversed and I told him about my Bible class and explained the process for inmates who wish to attend the class. He relayed this information from his end, and our ministry did the same. A week later, the fourth man joined the class.

So, just like that, God added four new souls to my class over the course of a few weeks. We actually had to start setting up an extra table and chairs to accommodate all the newcomers.

Sowing the seed of God's Word — that's our ministry in a nutshell. Together, we "plant" and we "water" so that God can grow His kingdom through the power of His Word. To God be all the glory.

Chaplain Joseph Radsek