

Will God do the same for you? For me? Will he keep us safe as long we are faithful to him and obey his commands? Not necessarily. We don't have a promise like that from God, just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had no guarantee that their ordeal would end in a miracle. In fact, God tells us just the opposite. He says, *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Ac 14:22)*. And Jesus says, *"In this world you will have trouble" (Jn 16:33)*.

So, fireproof your faith by letting go of your ego and laying hold of your God. Resist the temptation to compromise the truth of God's Word to keep peace in the family, at work, or in the relationship. If you have to endure some flames as a result, God will see you through them. The Apostle Peter says, *"The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast" (1 Pt 5:10)*. Doing things God's way isn't always the easy way, but it's the best way. Martin Luther discovered that when he stood before the Emperor and the church and took his stand on the Word of God. Did he feel the heat when he defied the Emperor's demand to recant, to take back all he had said about salvation being a free gift of God's grace? Absolutely! He had to go into hiding for eight months at the Wartburg Castle, but that gave him the time he needed to translate the Bible into the German language, the language of the people, so they could read for themselves the truth that they were saved by God's grace through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ.

That's not to say that every Christian will survive the fire. 1st century bishop, Polycarp, was burned for his faith. John Hus was burned at the stake in 1415. But even in death, especially in death, God is close to us when we take our stand on his Word. To Christians living in the first century, Jesus said, *"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Re 2:10)*.

Did you realize that the only thing the fire of the furnace burned besides the soldiers were the ropes that had bound Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? So also, the only thing that death can destroy is the bond that tethers us to this sinful world. That's a bond we don't mind giving up, isn't it? How can we be certain that we'll survive death unscathed? Because God has covered us in Jesus' righteousness, his wrath against our sins will not destroy us. It's in Jesus that God has fireproofed us from his wrath. Now fireproof your faith. It's time to let go of your ego and lay hold of your God. Amen.

Daniel 3:16-28—*What Time Is It? Time to Reform* – 474, 201, 293
11/04/18 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI

"I could see the smoke a dozen miles away," John Gurda wrote on May 31 of this year. "I was coming home from Oak Creek and, as I drove up I-94 toward Bay View, a broad plume of black smoke was spreading out from a point that seemed to be somewhere in downtown Milwaukee. This, I thought, must be a big one. When I got home and turned on the news, there it was: a four-alarm fire that had engulfed Trinity Lutheran Church on Ninth and Highland."

Paul Demcak of nearby St. John's Lutheran Church came to see the damage. He said, "It's awful to lose a place of worship to fire. It's where people have marked important things in their lives: baptisms, confirmations, weddings, anniversaries, funerals. It's a home. It's a church home," he said.

Last spring the members of Trinity Lutheran Church learned that their church was not fireproof. Isn't there a way to fireproof churches so that destruction like this won't happen? I suppose we could build a church out of metal and concrete, but what would we do with the pews? Replace them with metal benches? What about the hymnals? Go back to using clay tablets, as they once did? One hymnal alone would consist of 900 tablets. Try fitting that in the book rack in front of you! And what about the organ? How true it is that there are some things that we just cannot fireproof.

Have you ever felt that way about your faith? Have you wondered if your faith would withstand the test of bankruptcy or cancer or the death of a child or your mom or your dad? What if the government demanded that you deny Jesus and worship the President instead? Would you willingly disobey, even though it meant losing your life? In our text three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, did just that, even though it meant being thrown into a fiery furnace. How did they remain cool when the heat was on? How did Martin Luther stand up to princes, powers, and pope? How did these historical figures fireproof their faith? On this Sunday when we celebrate what God accomplished through Martin Luther some 500 years ago, let's find out how we can fireproof our faith. What time is it?

**It's Time to Reform
Let go of your ego.
Lay hold of God.**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were young Jewish men who had been dragged into captivity in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. One day their routine was interrupted when they were instructed to appear at the foot of a 90-foot statue of gold erected by the king. This was Nebuchadnezzar's version of a team-building exercise. Every civil servant was to bow down and worship the statue in a show of loyalty to the king. Anyone who disobeyed would be thrown into a fiery furnace. This wasn't an idle threat. The king had already burned people to death and, to provide an exclamation point to his decree, not too far away stood a furnace that was already emitting a column of smoke. What was on the minds of these three men? Did they think, "If we don't bow down to the statue, we'll die, and then what good will we be to God and his people? We're so young. We have our whole lives ahead of us. Surely God didn't bring us here only to die so young. God will understand, since we're just going through the motions anyway. And we can always ask for his forgiveness later on."

Do you see the problem with these thoughts? They're all turned inward; they're all selfish and self-centered. Were these three really indispensable in God's plan for his people? Couldn't God get along without them? Of course, he could. God is absolutely independent and doesn't need our input or actions to accomplish his will. So, what were they to do?

Since they knew that their reason for living was not to stay alive but to glorify God, that's just what they did. While everyone around them bowed down before the statue, they stayed standing—with hearts pounding, no doubt. It makes me think of Martin Luther as he stood before the authorities of church and government. It didn't take long for their actions to be reported to the king. He demanded that they obey, saying, "If you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" It was one thing to disobey the king when they had been far from him, but what were they to do now as they stood face to face with him? Remain cool, that's what. In measured tones and with carefully chosen words, words that showed respect for the king, but not backing down in their obedience to God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O 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 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."

What a bold response! Under no circumstances were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego going to obey the king's command. Oh, yes, they understood the consequences. And, no, they didn't have any promise from God that they would miraculously survive the fire, but that didn't matter. If God wanted to rescue them, he would do so. They were only to obey him. That was their job. What made for the fireproofed faith in the hearts of these men? Two things: they let go of their ego, and they lay hold of their God.

How that attitude runs contrary to our natural way of thinking. All too often we think way too much of ourselves and not enough of God. We think that our purpose in life is to save our own skin at all costs. We spend more time planning a family vacation than we do thinking about how we can get involved in the Lord's work. We spend gobs of money to win the lottery but little time planning our family's finances and practicing good stewardship. We twiddle our thumbs away in worry but seldom put our hands together in prayer. We adjust our schedule for everything under the sun but spend very little time sitting at Jesus' feet to hear what God says to us in his Word. How we need to take Jesus' words to heart, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Mark 8:36, 37)

These three young men were ready to forfeit their lives to hold on to their souls for eternity. This doesn't mean that they didn't cringe in fear when they saw the flames shoot out of the furnace. What should have happened—the whoosh of flaming clothes, the acrid smell of burning hair, and loud screams of pain—never happened. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who had been bound tightly with ropes, were not rolling around on the ground; they were casually walking around as if inspecting a piece of fruit at the grocery store. And what's more, the three were now four. Someone else was with them in the furnace, someone who, according to Nebuchadnezzar, "looks like a son of the gods...who has sent his angel and rescued his servants." This perhaps was the Angel of the Lord, the Son of God himself, guarding and protecting his beloved children from all evil and defending them from all danger.

Nebuchadnezzar was dumbfounded. Upon close inspection, it was clear to everyone that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's clothes weren't burned, their hairs hadn't been singed, and they didn't even smell like smoke! They had come out of the fiery furnace unscathed and "unsmoked." Clearly, God's powerful and loving hand had rescued them from Nebuchadnezzar's foolishness and pride.