



## **WEEKLY STUDY February 19 – February 25, 2023**

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

### **Our sermon series for February is: "Fear Not"**

Let's talk about fear! Is it something that's just an expected part of life? Does fear always stand in the way of our doing what we need to do? What place does fear have for us as followers of Jesus? How do we follow Jesus words to 'fear not' when it seems as if there is much to fear in our world?

### **Our scripture this week is Daniel 3:16-30, NRSV**

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.'

Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary, and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. So they were bound, still wearing their tunics, their trousers, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. Because the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But the three men fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose quickly. He said to his counselors, 'Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?' They answered the king, 'True, O King.' He replied, 'But I see four men bound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the fourth has the appearance of a god. Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!' So they came out from the fire. And all the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them. Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb,

and their houses laid to ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”

- 1) This Sunday we were blessed by the leadership of the children in our church. Every aspect of the service was amazing – their prayers; the interpretation of scripture; the music; the sermons. The 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class did a wonderful job of retelling the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Only a portion of the story is included above so you may want to find your Bible and read the entirety of Daniel 30. Remember the setting for this book is during the time that large numbers of the Israelites were held captive in Babylon. Many picked up the practices of Babylon – including worshipping the gods Babylon worshipped. But we have the example of the three in our scripture today who – in the face of deadly punishment – chose to stay true to the one God.

***Question: What parts of this story stand out to you? What message is contained here related to fear and staying true to one’s beliefs?***

- 2) Every portion of Sunday’s bulletin deserves examination. Through the Call to Worship; the Affirmation of Faith; the Offertory Prayer; the Prayer of the People; and the Sermons we were blessed with hearing faith expressed by the children (with their teachers) In the Affirmation of faith, the 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> grade class wrote these affirmations about the Holy Spirit: “We believe in the Holy Spirit who is personal and with us always. The Holy Spirit is like our teachers who offer us comfort when we are upset at school. The Holy Spirit is healing, and courage to stand up for what is right. The Holy Spirit is the calm that washes over us when we feel anxious as we prepare to bat. When we feel anger with a friend or neighbor the Holy Spirit gives us compassion and strength. When we are afraid in the storms and floods of life, the Holy Spirit is like a parent who picks us up and keeps us safe. The Holy Spirit is our confidence when we are shooting free throws at a basketball game. The Holy Spirit is our calm, our comfort in death and sorrow, the strength to love other people, and the confidence that no matter what, it will be okay.”

***Question: Reflect on how the children have taken very concrete experiences and talked about how the Holy Spirit is present in a concrete way to help and comfort. What some experiences in your own life where you have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in very concrete and visible ways?***

- 3) In their sermons, all three boys mentioned something about Martin Luther King, Jr. and Black History month. Certainly, in the face of fear, Martin Luther King, Jr. did stand strong in his faith and continued to stay true to his fight for equality and justice. And at the same time, the story in Daniel 30 is a reminder that what happened to Israelites has parallels with what happened Tom many African Americans. Many African Americans in the US are descendants of enslaved people who were captured and brought here against their will where they were expected to give up who they had been and assimilate. One of the boys talked about mutual support and the power of the collective in providing support to one another when standing up for what is right. They reminded

us that as a church we are there to encourage one another; to stand up for what is right; and to know that God is with us.

**Question: *In what ways do you see a faith community being “the power of the collective in supporting what is right?”***

- 4) Another note I made while listening to the sermons was this quote: “There are so many reasons to worship God.” I thought that was a powerful statement. Sometimes I wonder if my prayers go a smidge into whining. And sometimes I wonder if in times of fear I remember God’s presence is there to steady me for what needs to be done. I wonder if I forget to name the many ways faith in God allows me to be the person God created me to be. And perhaps I need to spend time pondering the many reasons to worship God.

**Question: *What are some of the many reasons you can name to worship God?***

**Prayer:** (Our prayer this week is the benediction from Sunday’s service.)

**“Empower us, O God, to hold our fear alongside our faith. Be with us as we follow your trusted voice calling us into a deeper relationship with you. May we listen to voices proclaiming to us, “Do not be afraid.” AMEN”**

**Weekly Challenge: This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. It marks the beginning of the season of Lent. In the church it is a time to deepen our faith; to spend time listening for God’s guidance; to give witness in our actions and practices to our faith. While giving up a habit or practice that is bad for us is a part of Lent. Also a part of deepening our faith in Lent is adding a practice that brings us closer to God. What will you add to you daily life to draw closer to God?**

*(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)*



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## OUT OF MY CONTROL

The actions of others

The outcome of my efforts

The future

### IN MY CONTROL

Being present in this moment

Past mistakes

My words

How I speak to myself

My mindset

What I give my energy to

The opinions of others

How I spend my free time

How I move on from failure

Other people's boundaries

The boundaries I set

What happens around me

What other people think of me

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