

Not Being A Furnace Avoider
A Message Series on the Book of Daniel
4th Sunday in Lent
March 11, 2018
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

During the Vietnam War...



...David Roever went through rigorous training to become part of the ultra-elite Special Forces team the Navy used on dangerous search-and-destroy missions. During a nighttime raid on an enemy stronghold, David experienced the greatest trial of his life. When he and his men were pinned down by enemy machine-gun fire, he pulled a phosphorus grenade from his belt and stood up to throw it. But as he pulled back his arm, a bullet hit the grenade, and it exploded next to his ear.

Lying on his side on the bank of a muddy river, his entire face and shoulder alternately smoldered and caught on fire as the phosphorus that had embedded itself in his body came into contact with the air. David knew that he was going to die, yet miraculously he didn't. He was pulled from the water by his fellow soldiers, flown directly to Saigon, and then taken to a waiting plane bound for Hawaii.

But David's problems were just beginning. When he first went into surgery -- the first of what would become dozens of operations -- the surgical team had a major problem during the operation. As they cut away tissue that had been burned or torn by the grenade, the phosphorus would hit the oxygen in the operating room and begin to ignite again! Several times the doctors and nurses ran out of the room, leaving him alone because they were afraid the oxygen used in surgery would explode! Incredibly, David survived the operation and was taken to a ward that held the most severe burn and injury cases from the war.

Lying on his bed, David knew he presented a grotesque picture. Although he had once been a handsome man, he knew he had nothing to offer his wife or anyone else because of his appearance. He felt more alone and more worthless than he had ever felt in his life. David's wife arrived. He dreaded her coming. His wife, a strong Christian, took one look at him, came over, and kissed him on the only place on his face that wasn't bandaged. In a gentle voice she said, *"Honey, I love you. I'll always love you. And I want you to know that whatever it takes, whatever the odds, we can make it together."* She hugged him where she could to avoid disturbing his injuries and stayed with him for the next several days. His own wife's love for him gave David tremendous strength. More than that, her understanding and accepting him greatly reinforced his own relationship with the Lord.

In the weeks and months that followed, David's wounds slowly but steadily healed. It took dozens of operations and months of agonizing recovery, but today, miraculously, David can see and hear...



...On national television, David made an incredible statement. *"I am twice the person I was before I went to Vietnam. For one thing, God has used my suffering to help me feel other people's pain and to have an incredible burden to reach people for Him..."*



...The Lord has let me have a worldwide, positive effect on people's lives because of what I went through. I wouldn't trade anything I've gone through for the benefits my trials have had in my life...



...on my family's life and on countless teenagers and adults I've had the opportunity to influence over the years."

James 1: 2-4 - Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations. Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience. But let endurance and steadfastness and patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be [people] perfectly and fully developed [with no defects], lacking in nothing.

As someone once said, *"The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials."*

And the trials will come...especially as we stand up for our faith...

Daniel's friends discovered this...they understood...they, like David Roever, faced actual flames...they faced the fiery furnace...

Daniel 3:1-18 (NIV) - King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever! Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But 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?”

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.”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego face being thrown into the furnace...



...into the flames...they face Nebuchadnezzar...the king is enraged... “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you...we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.” No amount of discussion would change one simple fact: they would not bow.

They were ready to face the fire...the flames...the trial that awaited them...



They trusted that God would be with them...they looked forward to what awaited them beyond this world...they knew, as Paul writes...

Romans 8:18 (NIV) - ***“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”***

How often we stand afraid, discouraged, despairing as we face the fire?

We are like the seed in Jesus’ parable of the sower...we are like the seed that falls to the ground and grows up quick but doesn’t build strong, deep roots. Therefore, when the sun shines on such a newly-sprouted plant, it withers and dies. Many people accept Christ...things go well for a time...but then the sun shines, heat strikes, trials come...suddenly their faith takes a hit and since their roots are shallow, they wither. Their faith is questioned...they give into despair and question, *“Where is God?”*

This is the problem with the *“feel-good, prosperity”* message given by some preachers...People are told that Jesus will fix your marriage...Jesus will break your addiction...Jesus will cure your sickness...Jesus will fill your life with joy...

Jesus does do these things but sometimes marriages fail, addictions carry-on for years, diseases kill, and life is anything but joyful...

There are simply times that we are thrown into the fiery furnace...times when our faith does not keep us out of the flames of life. Jesus told us, ***“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”*** (John 16:33).

It is then, when we are facing the furnace, when we feel the heat of the flames lick our faces...It is then we must remember what God has done...it is then we must embrace Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf...we must reflect and hear the banging of the nails, picture the crown of thorns, wrap our arms around the cross and the reality that Jesus paid the price for us to one day spend eternity with him...



Our eternal reward is worth any suffering we may have to endure first.

With that knowledge, we can embrace our trials and see in them opportunity...we can begin to look at our trials not as a wall, stopping us in our tracks, that we have to break out of...but as another step forward in our faith journey, in our development...



...another step toward our destination.

Paul writes in Romans 5:3-5 - ***We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us – they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation does not disappoint us.***

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18, that on this journey, with its many trials and fiery furnaces, we are “*constantly being transformed into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another...*” It is through our trials, the fires, that we are refined and made pure.



In the future we will become; until then we must overcome.

But God doesn't only teach us through our trials and heartaches, molding our character and preparing us for eternity...God does much more...

God...Jesus Christ...walks with us in the flames.



Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego understood as Charles Spurgeon once wrote, *“As sure as ever God puts his children in the furnace, he will be in the furnace with them.”*

Daniel 3: 19-30 (NIV) - *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. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are thrown into the flames. Nebuchadnezzar looks into the furnace and sees a fourth man...



...together they are walking about in the flames, unharmed...and Nebuchadnezzar yells, “*and the form of the fourth is like the Son of Man.*” Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are freed from the fiery furnace and we read, “*the hair of the head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of the fire was not on them.*”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego trusted God to protect them...

...they would have been familiar with the psalms...they believed, like the psalmist...

Psalm 61:2 – God is referred to as the *“rock that is higher than I”*

Psalm 62:2 – *“He only is my Rock and my Salvation, my defense and my fortress. I shall not be greatly moved.”*

Psalm 18:2 – *“The Lord is my Rock, My Fortress, and my Deliverer...My Shield...My High Tower.”*

God is with us in the flames, through the trials of life.

Cancer? God is there. Financial Struggle? God is there. Lost your job? God is there. Marriage struggling? God is there. Lost a loved one? God is there. Facing death? God is most definitely there.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew that the flames would not have the last word...and because they trusted God and faced the trial before them with faith...they were blessed.

More than being promoted by King Nebuchadnezzar...



...they experienced an *“up close and personal”* encounter with God...they got to walk around with him.



Not only that, but the ropes that bound them were burned off...they were freed.

Furthermore, their faith was strengthened, their character was built up, and in the future, they would certainly be even more willing to witness to God and stand up for their faith...



...they would be able to talk to others who were going through trials, giving them encouragement...sharing their story.

As Henry Ward Beecher wrote, *"Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things."*

All these blessing would have been missed if they had avoided the furnace.

When we are unwilling to face our trials...when we don't look for God in the midst of darkest times...when we run and despair and turn our eyes from God...when we don't build deep roots and stand firm, withstanding the wind...when we decide to be *"furnace avoiders"*...we miss out on God's blessings.

Listen to how Laura Story explains it in her song, "Blessings"...

http://youtu.be/fEPo-_5bGKw OR <http://youtu.be/w-JjlwBFg1Q>

"Blessings"

We pray for blessings, we pray for peace
 Comfort for family, protection while we sleep
 We pray for healing, for prosperity
 We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering
 And all the while, You hear each spoken need
 Yet love us way too much to give us lesser things

'Cause what if your blessings come through rain drops
 What if Your healing comes through tears
 What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near
 What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

We pray for wisdom, Your voice to hear
 We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near
 We doubt your goodness, we doubt your love
 As if every promise from Your word is not enough
 And all the while, You hear each desperate plea
 And long that we'd have faith to believe

'Cause what if your blessings come through rain drops
 What if Your healing comes through tears
 What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near
 What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

When friends betray us
 When darkness seems to win
 We know that pain reminds this heart
 That this is not,
 This is not our home
 It's not our home

'Cause what if your blessings come through rain drops
 What if Your healing comes through tears
 What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near

What if my greatest disappointments or the aching of this life
 Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy
 What if trials of this life
 The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
 Are your mercies in disguise

Remember...we should never forget that redemption, our salvation, forgiveness...the world's greatest blessing is the fruit of the world's greatest sorrow...



Perhaps you are facing a trial today...

Perhaps the question isn't: *"Why, God?"*

Perhaps the prayer isn't: *"Please Lord, take this trial from me?"*

Perhaps the question is: *"To What Purpose?"*

Perhaps the prayer is: *"God show me what you would have me learn...Create in me a heart like yours. Please Walk with me in the flames."*

What is your fiery furnace? Are you embracing it, trusting God to walk with you through the flames or are you trying to avoid it, running in the opposite direction? What might God be teaching you through the flames? What blessing might God have for you in the fire?

Perhaps it is in the flames that you will experience and touch the face of God.

Remember Vietnam Vet...David Roever...

"I wouldn't trade anything I've gone through for the benefits my trials have had in my life."

-Dave Roever, *Wounded Warrior, Vietnam*

I pray we all can one day say the same.