

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
11th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, August 9, 2026
Scripture: Daniel 3: 8-30; Isaiah 43: 1-2
Sermon: Through The Fire

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—what wonderful names. I remember learning about them in Sunday School when I was younger. What a marvelous story this is about faith, trust and perseverance. The book of Daniel is a witness of all this for it was written during an age of crisis.

The people were being forced to believe in and worship idols of the king. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood their ground and would not bow down to the idol that King Nebuchadnezzar had made for worship.

They vowed instead to worship only the Lord they loved and trusted in and because they wouldn't do what the king wanted they were thrown into the fiery furnace together.

It is truly an amazing witness of faith that these three men were willing to be persecuted and put to death because of their trust in God. They could have easily bowed down to save their life but together they stood firm in their belief that God would be with them no matter what happened. Whether they lived or died they would be with God.

What strong faith they had and what trust in God as their protector.

But as we read this story many times we wonder why God did not save them in the first place from being thrown into the fiery furnace? Why didn't God prevent the situation all together?

We wonder the same thing about our own situations in life. We certainly wonder about that same question when we are going through difficult times that seem like a fiery furnace.

We wonder where God is when we need God the most. We may feel deserted as though we are going through the fires in our life alone.

Sometimes life just doesn't turn out like we expected it to be when we were younger. We are faced with difficult decisions—life changing situations and we wonder why we have to go through it all.

We pray to God to give us strength and if possible to deliver us from difficult situations—to make things comfortable for us but life doesn't always seem to work that way.

Instead of life being a Merry-go-round it turns out to be a Roller Coaster with many ups and downs. Our prayers become prayers to have strength to walk through difficult times.

This passage today can speak to us about God walking with us through the difficult times.

The fires of relationships that hurt and need healing.

The fire of grief and learning to navigate life without the other person. The fire of children or family members who are ill and taking care of them everyday.

Trusting in God's presence during our times of struggle is a very difficult thing to do because within the struggle comes a questioning and doubting of ourselves as well as God. But I believe it can lead us to a deeper relationship and a deeper understanding and commitment to God if we open up the communication with God.

Even though it may seem as though we are walking alone through the fire I believe we aren't, for the Bible testifies that God walked with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

God walked with Moses and Joshua leading the people to the promised land. God was in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. God was always with them. God was with Joseph in prison, God was with Esther. God walks with you and with me giving us strength to go on. God gives us insight and wisdom as we grow in our relationship with him.

Faith in action allows us to move ahead without complete knowledge of the outcome ahead of time. The three men didn't know if they would be consumed or not when they were thrown into the fire, but trusting in God together they took the step. Together they had the courage to face the unknown, not knowing the outcome.

Together we all will walk towards and through the unknown—the uncertainty of life. The three men didn't walk into the fiery furnace one at a

time; they walked together and together their faith gave them strength to move into the unknown.

God gives us each other to love, to support, to care for and to walk with during times of struggle and uncertainty and during times of rejoicing.

God's presence is powerfully illustrated in this passage by the miracle given by the fourth mysterious figure protecting the men in the midst of the fire.

King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished at what he saw in the furnace. He said, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire? But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

Four people seen with the fire—a presence there to strengthen, guide, sustain, and preserve them through the fire. This experience was to be a witness to those around them showing others the power of the God these men worshiped.

I hope we can see this as a very powerful and empowering image to preserve us through difficult situations. To think of God's presence never leaving us no matter what and whether we realize it or not. Realizing we don't have to walk alone. God is with us and others are around us and by our side.

Because God walks with us through difficult situations in life doesn't mean that we won't be hurt, that we won't suffer, that a loved one isn't going to die. We are human and we will be faced with all these at some point in our life and sometimes we will have to go through difficult things in life with God by our side.

When we are faced with fires in our life and in our world "Who will we trust?" "Who will we worship?" "Who will we turn to for strength and guidance?"

To think about your own struggle and fires of life: What kind of fires have you had to face and walk through? What has the presence of God meant for you and how is God helping you through difficult situations?

How does the knowledge that God walks with you give you hope for your future? The presence of God is mysterious as it was within this passage and God's presence can be felt in different ways and through different means. It can be a time of empowerment from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus came to teach us to love one another—to worship together—to be in community with each other and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The presence of God came within the fourth figure seen in the furnace as each man walked into the unknown; they were empowered to move forward in faith.

Their faith was not dependent on a favorable outcome; they obeyed God regardless of the cost.

An enraged King Nebuchadnezzar had the furnace heated seven times hotter, killing the guards who threw them in. The king looked in and saw four men walking around loose and unharmed, saying the fourth looked like a son of the gods. The men emerged without even the smell of smoke on them, prompting the king to praise the Most High God.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's obedience could have been very costly, and they could have paid with their lives. You and I know the end of the story, but they didn't! They lived to tell the story of how God saved them.

Their obedience allowed their own lives to be spared, God's reputation to be upheld and Nebuchadnezzar's life changed. Their willingness to pay the cost influenced a full empire.

The determination of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego proved their dedication to God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's beliefs did not yield to pressure, compromise, or social acceptance as they were fully willing to obey.

Whatever life throws at us and how difficult our circumstances may be, we can thrive and not just survive, in this challenging world.

The three men walked with peace despite the intense pressure they were under to do what the King wanted. That powerful way to live came from their answer to a question we all must answer. "Will I live for myself, or will I fully surrender my life to God?"

How do you respond to the fires of your life? Do you trust God in the fire?

Does your response to painful trials in your life reveal God to people of this world or not?

Trust God in the pressures and challenges of life's fires and watch what happens.

Within the presence and care of God may we find the strength to move forward, the confidence to turn our fears into faith, our suffering into victory, and peace as we walk together.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

As followers of Jesus, we don't need to fear anything that comes our way, because our trust in God is solid in knowing that we are His and He is with us no matter what circumstances we may face.

I'm so thankful that we don't ever have to face anything alone. Friends, if you know Jesus as your Savior, and you are seeking to follow his way, he is with you. When the waters rise or the flames burn hot, look for him as he meets you there. It might end up being the most precious and significant experience of your faith journey.