

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
October 28, 2012  
Reformation Sunday**

**Daniel 3:16-278**

**Will You Stand?**

- 1. A question for Martin Luther**
- 2. A question for Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego**
- 3. A question for you**

**Hymns: 204 – 200 – 203**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Will you stand? That short question was at the heart of the Reformation. In the 1500's, the Catholic church was more than just a church. The Pope was the most powerful man in the world and he was the leader of the Holy Roman Empire. His power and authority were never questioned as he sat as the supposed voice of God on his earthly throne. As Luther pondered that question, he was facing an overwhelming task. Would this lowly, conscience-stricken monk from a small town in Germany rise from his humble place and stand defiantly before the many governors, kings and emperors who opposed him?

It was a simple and straightforward decree that came from those governors, kings and the pope himself. Luther could back down in his opposition, or he could stand up for what he believed and most likely be put to death as a heretic, a man who was thought to be rebelling against God himself.

Though the stakes were life and death, and though Martin Luther seemed to be facing an insurmountable enemy, in his mind the answer to that question was clear. The answer that he gave to the governors, kings, and emperors of this world was full of faith and it was grounded in conviction. **"I cannot and will not recant,"** he proclaimed. **"Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."** When Martin Luther chose to stand, he was standing on the firmest foundation that one could have – the pure and holy Word of God. In a world, in a church that had cast aside the Bible in favor of the thoughts and words of men, Luther dug deep into the Word of God. He studied the Word, and he rediscovered what God truly had to say about sin and salvation. For too long, the church had used its unquestioned authority to lead its people to despair and hopelessness. Instead of preaching that God's forgiveness was full and free,

they proclaimed that God's favor needed to be bought and paid for like a grocery off the shelf. Through the arrogance and greed of men, the Gospel had become anything but the good news that it was meant to be. It was an anchor that was held around people's necks. God's grace had become anything but the undeserved love which the Bible proclaimed. It was something that man could earn by opening up his pocketbook.

So when that question was given, "Will you stand?" The answer was given. **"Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."** Martin Luther stood and he pointed to Scripture alone. He stood knowing that God gives forgiveness by grace alone, He stood, proclaiming that each person has that gift from God by faith alone.

And when Martin Luther stood, it was God's grace that produced miraculous and unexpected results. A reformation began which would literally change the political landscape of the entire world; a reformation began which would change the future of the world. A man who many assumed would be put to death for his opposition would live on and die of natural causes. But most importantly, the Word of God was rescued from the hands of deceitful men. Through the stance of the many reformers of that age, God was working to ensure that his pure Gospel message would endure. Through Luther's stance, God ensured that you and I, and so many others, would know the truth of what God in love did for us. And so, we give thanks to God that he gave Martin Luther courage, boldness, and faith to stand up for what he believed.

But you know, though Martin Luther might be most famous for standing up for the Gospel, he is hardly alone. He was certainly not the first who was asked to stand for what he believed and he was not the last.

One of the Bible lessons chosen for this Reformation Sunday tells us about three men who were faced with that same question that Luther was faced with, but thousands of years before him. "Will you stand?" And as we look at their story, it is truly amazing just how similar their situation was.

Just like Martin Luther, these three men faced the most powerful authority in the world. Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon, the second great Empire in the history of the world. After the fall of Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army routed Egypt in 605 B.C. and grasped firm control of the world. There was not a nation on earth that could stand against Nebuchadnezzar. There was not a king on earth who would dare to question his power. And Nebuchadnezzar knew it. In his conceit, Nebuchadnezzar saw himself as a god who deserved to be worshipped. In the OT book of Daniel, we are told that he made a 90 foot tall gold statue of himself

and he made a bold decree, "Every person serving in his royal courts was to bow down and worship that image of gold."

For three young Jewish men serving in those courts, this presented a dilemma. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been taken from their home in Israel to captivity in Babylon. They had been selected as the smartest and the strongest, handpicked to live and serve and thrive in the King's court. But now, a decree had been placed before them that would change their lives. "Bow down to that image of the King or be thrown to your death in a fiery furnace."

Again, the stakes for God's people was life and death. Again, the opposition seemed insurmountable. But once again, the answer to the decree was clear. **"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "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."** Those men stood before the most powerful man in the world and they spoke clearly. Their answer was full of conviction and it was grounded in faith. They knew who the true God was and they knew that he alone holds the power in this world. They put their faith in the God that saves and they did not let the threat of death keep them from standing. And as they stood, they confessed their faith before men from every nation on earth, men who certainly laughed as they chose certain death.

However, when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood, God's grace once again provided miraculous and unexpected results. Nebuchadnezzar's rage burned against these men, and he carried out the threat that he had given. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the blazing furnace, they were thrown to their death. But God used that fiery furnace to show Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians who the true God is. **"King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." 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."***

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were guarded by God in an amazing way. And as awesome as that rescue was, the second result that God produced from their stance is more amazing. The most powerful man in the world, the king of a godless and immoral Empire acknowledged the true God because these men stood for what they believed. ***"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."*** We don't know whether Nebuchadnezzar or any of his people came to saving faith, but God certainly used the stance of his three followers to proclaim that he is the true God. And so, we give thanks that God gave Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego the courage, boldness, and faith to stand up for what they believed.

Now, on this day of Reformation celebration, the focus turns to you. The question that was asked of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the question that was asked to Martin Luther, is put before you. "Will you stand?"

Just as he was in the past, the devil is still on the attack against the Gospel of God's grace. The devil fights constantly against those who hold onto the hope of that message. As we see from the past, he has powerful tools at his disposal. He will not hesitate to throw persecutions or even threats of death our way, if that is what will most successfully keep us from standing up for the Gospel. However, in our time, it appears that he does not need to use such heavy forms of opposition to keep us from standing. Instead, the devil uses declining numbers and rising indifference in this world to lead us to doubt the power and effectiveness of the Gospel. He uses busy lives and unreceptive ears to have us doubt the urgency and necessity of spreading the Gospel. He uses changing morality and more liberal views to have us back down from the truths of Scripture. All around us, we find people who attack the Gospel, by blatant rejection or by subtly compromising its truths.

As Martin Luther was called to stand against popes, as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were called to stand against kings, we are often called instead to stand against friends, family, coworkers, peers. And when standing up for God threatens to come between our closest relationships, it is easy to see why we so often hesitate. If we stand for what the Bible says, the world will try to put us down. The

world will label us as close-minded. The world will tell us that we are unloving.

But let us use this Reformation celebration to remember exactly what we stand for. The pure message of the Gospel changes lives; it has changed each our lives. God has given every person an answer to the sin and guilt that fills their lives. He has given the promise of life eternal in heaven. That is the message of the Word of God and it is a message that we are charged to protect. It is a message that God asks his people to stand up for.

And as we stand, God will produce miraculous and unexpected results. What they are, I do not know for sure. But as I look back at God's people who have stood for the Gospel before us, I see that God is faithful to His Faithful people. So, as you go out into a world of opposition, hold onto the unchanging promises of the Gospel. Stand with the assurance of deliverance from this world. Stand firm by clinging to the truths of God's saving Word. Stand firm knowing that God is your foundation. And as the church does in every age, hold the Gospel dear!  
Amen.