

A Sunday Devotional for People and Families at Home
The First Church of Evans
Week Seven - Sunday, May 3, 2020

Greetings from Jerusalem Corners,

Today marks the second Communion Sunday we have not been able to gather at table in our sanctuary to share the sacrament. For me, and I think for all of you, it has been a difficult burden to bear. Our church council has wrestled with these challenges and it is our prayer and our hope this month to add to these printed devotionals some opportunities to sing at home and to fellowship together face to face on our computers. So starting today, we have added features to these devotionals that we hope will deepen our worship and fellowship as time goes on.

Call to Worship

1 Timothy 2:1-4

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings
be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions,
that we may live a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.
This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,
who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

An Opening Prayer:

Almighty God and Father,

You are the Ruler of heaven and earth and the Savior of all who trust in you. Please forgive us our sins and bear us through the challenges and adversities of this life, so that we love and know and faithfully serve you and so become a blessing to those people you have called us to reach and serve. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Devotional

Daniel 3:14-18, 28

Carl Mende, Church Council Vice Chair

*Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I set up?
Now if you are ready, when you hear the sound of the horn...and every kind of music,
to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good.
But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.
And who is the god who will be able to deliver you from my hands?"
Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar...
If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace,
and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king,
that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up."*

The first century church suffered a great deal of persecution and Jesus had told His disciples that they would be persecuted. The expectation and importance of suffering is a central theme throughout the New Testament. For those of us who live in the relative safety of the western world the concept of persecution and suffering for Christ is foreign, but for many of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world it is an all too common reality.

In the book of Daniel we are all familiar with the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace. King Nebuchadnezzar decided to have a massive golden image made and commanded everyone to fall down and worship the image whenever a special band played music. Of course, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as worshippers of the true God, refused to obey this command and their enemies used it as an opportunity to accuse them before the King.

In Dan 3:15 we see Nebuchadnezzar's statement to the three men, "*Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn... and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?*" The King in his anger and arrogance actually tried to place himself above God, saying, "*And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?*" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's answer is amazing and awe-inspiring. They responded in verses 16-18: "*O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up.*" They understood that whether they were delivered from the furnace or not, God was still in charge. God promises to be with us always, but we need to remember that what happens to us in this world is not the end of the story.

I pray that none of us ever has to face a decision like this. Recently the mayor of New York City threatened to "permanently close the buildings" of all churches that violated his COVID-19 stay at home orders. This threat raises the question of how we would choose if we were faced with the decision of whether to choose between obeying God or man. The Apostle Paul, however, does offer us encouragement, he writes in our Call to Worship from 1 Timothy 2:1-4: "*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may live a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our*

Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego does not end with them dying in the fiery furnace, but rather with Nebuchadnezzar acknowledging God. In Daniel 3:28 we read him proclaiming: “*Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.*” Let’s make it a point to pray daily for our leaders so that we can live and worship in peace. Our prayers can have an effect and we can pray that they, as Nebuchadnezzar, would come to the knowledge of the truth and praise God.

Offering Acts 20:35 “...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Thank you for the faithfulness you have shown Christ and his kingdom during this season. Please mail what your heart leads you to give to: The First Church of Evans, Attn: Cindy Fanara, P.O. Box 364, Derby, NY, 14047.

(What follows is the script for a worship video that we hope to produce this week and make available on our website and in our weekly worship email. If you cannot access the video, you can still join us by reading and praying and singing through our continuing Order of Worship.)

Hymn “Fairest Lord Jesus” See Insert

Table Talk *Ephesians 5:17-20* Pastor Stephen Ridge

*Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
And do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit,
speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
making melody to the Lord in your heart, giving thanks always and for everything
to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

Well, I can’t meet your eyes or hear your voices which makes this a bittersweet experience for me this morning. For going on two months we have been barred from gathering in this room to love and worship our God and to love and encourage each other...barred by the governing authorities who are seeking to protect us from what I believe is a genuine and dangerous threat, a virus whose qualities could kill hundreds of thousands of people if we didn’t shelter from it. In Carl Mende’s devotional, which I hope you’ve already read this morning, he correctly compares us to Daniel and his three friends, who found themselves in exile from their worship sanctuary, hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem.

And their response was similar to ours. They worshiped where and when they could. In Daniel, chapter 6, we are shown a picture of Daniel, worshipping in his bedroom by himself, gazing out the west window of his palace apartment, longing for the Jerusalem sanctuary where he used to worship as a boy. Now praying by yourself in a palace apartment is nothing like meeting the eyes or hearing the voices of loved ones and friends singing in the presence of the Almighty.

What we have been doing this last month is not full-bodied, common worship. But the time we’ve spent with God on Sunday mornings in our private spaces is real and powerful, so real that the pagans around Daniel and his friends threw them into a furnace and into a lion’s den to defend their pagan way of life against the light and truth of Israel’s God. Carl was quite correct to remind us this morning that, someday, we might find ourselves on the wrong side of lawless pagan tyrants, seeking to snuff out the faith and loyalty and obedience that we owe God.

But I think it’s necessary to say that we are not there yet. I believe that President Trump and Governor Cuomo and even Mayor Di Blasio in New York City have been seeking, however imperfectly, to protect us against a real threat to our health and safety. I believe that, before too much longer, we will meet one another’s eyes and hear one another’s voices in this sanctuary again. Until then it will be necessary for us to faithfully worship where and when we can, and to trust God through whatever challenges the pandemic and its aftermath sends our way.

Prayer Matthew 7:7 “*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.*” Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face this danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please remember our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities. Please especially remember the Maybee, Willer and Norton families as they mourn loved ones, and Eric DePan as he recovers from eye surgery.

Hymn “This Is My Father’s World” See Insert

An Ancient Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26 “*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace.*”

With love from The First Church of Evans, till our eyes meet and our hands touch again.