

Lutheran Church of the Master  
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188  
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor  
September 26/27, 2009  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
“A Cup of Cool Water in the Fiery Furnace”

**James 5:13-20 (New International Version)**

The

Prayer of Faith

<sup>13</sup>Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

<sup>17</sup>Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup>Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. <sup>19</sup>My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, <sup>20</sup>remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

**Mark 9:38-50 (New International Version)**

<sup>38</sup>"Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

<sup>39</sup>"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, <sup>40</sup>for whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup>I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

<sup>42</sup>"And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. <sup>43</sup>If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. <sup>44</sup>And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. <sup>45</sup>And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, <sup>46</sup>where

" their worm does not die,  
and the fire is not quenched. <sup>47</sup>Everyone will be salted with fire.

<sup>50</sup>"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

Speaking of fires ... so you remember the one that we read about in the Apocalyptic book in the Old Testament called Daniel? This is one of the stories that our Sunday School students are studying during this first Rotation Unit this year ... if you have children in Sunday School, you'd better be ready to talk about it with your children!

The story starts ... <sup>1</sup> In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia <sup>[a]</sup> and put in the treasure house of his god.

<sup>3</sup> Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility- <sup>4</sup> young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. <sup>[b]</sup> <sup>5</sup> The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

<sup>6</sup> Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. <sup>9</sup> Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, <sup>10</sup> but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your <sup>[c]</sup> food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

<sup>11</sup> Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." <sup>14</sup> So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

<sup>15</sup> At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. <sup>16</sup> So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

<sup>17</sup> To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

AND THEN... TO ABBREVIATE THE STORY ... THE KING HAS A BAD DREAM ... HE WANTS AN INTERPRETATION ... HE SENDS FOR HIS OFFICIAL DREAM INTERPRETERS, AND IN ORDER TO REALLY PUT THEM TO THE TEST, THEY FIRST OF ALL HAVE TO TELL HIM WHAT HIS DREAM WAS ... AND THEN INTERPRET IT ... THEY CAN'T ... THE KING GETS MAD AND THREATENS THEM ALL WITH DEATH ... DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS GO TO THE KING TO BEG FOR MERCY FOR HIS ASTROLOGERS AND TO TELL HIM HIS DREAM ... WHICH THEY DO ... SO THE KING

<sup>46</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. <sup>47</sup> The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

<sup>48</sup> Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. <sup>49</sup> Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

THEN IN A LITTLE WHILE, THE KING DID AS SO MANY KINGS DID ... HE:

<sup>1</sup> King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet <sup>[a]</sup> wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup> 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.

THEN ... the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: <sup>5</sup> As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

BUT THEN, SOME (OTHER?) astrologers <sup>[b]</sup> came forward and denounced the Jews. <sup>9</sup> They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup> You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, <sup>11</sup> and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. <sup>12</sup> 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, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

<sup>13</sup> Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> 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? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes 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?"

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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."

<sup>19</sup> 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 <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

<sup>24</sup> 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, O king."

<sup>25</sup> 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."

<sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> 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."

<sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

We've got some great examples of faith before us in worship (tonight/this morning)!

Elijah ... Daniel ... Shadrach, Meschack, and Abednego ... and, of course, Jesus.

The lessons each and all talk about people of faith in difficult times ... and each of them and all of them are words of encouragement to me and to you ... to hang in there "when the going gets tough." That is what I reminded the Sunday School teachers about when we met in "the Lion's Den" a couple weeks ago to look at what Daniel is all about ... and I reminded them that just like the book of the Revelation in the New Testament, this is a story like "Narnia" or "Harry Potter" or "Lord of the Rings."

It is a sermon preached when things are worse than they have ever been ... and not likely to get any better in the near future.

It is a message to the People of God to "hang in there" because eventually good will triumph over evil ... love will overcome hatred ... God will have the last blow ...

So ... when things are bad ... sing, pray, stand together, kneel together, band together ... and God's will will be done ...eventually!

Tomorrow/Today in worship we proclaim our confidence in that in a very special way ... Stefanie and Daniel are going to bring Gabriella ... and Keith and Julie are going to bring Presley ... to this baptismal font ... and I'm going to pour three handfuls of water over each of their heads ... one in the Name of the Father, one in the Name of the Son, and one in the Name of the Holy Spirit ... and I'm going to baptize them into the Body of Christ.

I'll probably splash some of that water all over the place ... because I like to remind us visually of God's amazing grace that does splash over us all ... and I'm going to trace the sign of a cross on their foreheads with oil ...to remind them of Jesus Cross ... with a sense that the cross traced remains from the day of our baptisms through the hour of our death and ushers us into the unending eternity which we call "heaven."

This is what allows us to repeat with the Psalmist "yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow, I fear no evil for you are with me." Jesus promised it to us in the waters of our baptism ... and Jesus is with us every second of our life.

We do this in hope that each one of us will have the confidence of Daniel, Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego ... and Elijah ... and the disciples with Jesus ...

These waters of baptism are our hope in the prayers over our bodies when we are sick ... our concerns when we are in trouble ... and even our confessions when we realize that we have made some (bad?) mistakes.

These water of baptism are not about our feeble attempts to respond to God ... but about God's strong promise to be with us. This water is God at work in us ... and for us ... and with us. God has plans for these two ... just like God has plans for you ... and me ...

This is a sacrament ... something we do simply because Jesus told us to. A sacrament consists of two things: an earthly element and the promise of Jesus. With the water Jesus said "go and baptize." With the bread and wine, Jesus said "take and eat ... take and drink."

And so we do.