

Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word!

A sermon based on Daniel 3:16-28.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, we are celebrating a special day, one with Lutherans across the world. There's no hiding that. Today, we are celebrating a 496-year, 6-month, 12-day anniversary. No? Of course, the hallmark day for the Lutheran Church has been and always will be October 31, 1517, the day when Martin Luther "announced" his informal break from the Roman Catholic Church as he famously nailed 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg...theses which detailed and condemned their lies in selling of papal indulgences. You know what those were, right? Pieces of paper which, when acquired, could lessen a person's stay in purgatory. In other words, buy your way to eternal life. And 500 years ago, Martin Luther publicly proclaimed that practice flew in the face of God's Word.

But I want to get back to our 496-year, 6-month, 12-day anniversary. It was April 18, 1521. In the German town of Worms, in the presence of the Holy Roman Emperor and leaders of the Catholic Church, Martin Luther stood, all alone, asked to recant, to take back what he had written in letters, in his books, in all his writings.

His answer? **"Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer...Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise."**

Martin Luther, in the midst of his enemies, gave witness to what truly guided his life, God's Word. To go against that Word would have been dangerous for his soul. He wasn't willing to risk his eternity to appease the sinful appetites of humans. He wanted to live for God. And so his motto for living is our prayer this morning, "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word."

If there's a word you could use to describe Luther's demeanor in that intense moment, in the midst of an extremely hostile crowd and overall environment, what would it be? Think about it for a second. What is it? Brave, courageous, bold...maybe. Out of his mind? Probably not so much. Integrity...that's the word I would use...you know, unwilling to give in or compromise....or as our theme today suggests, to be steadfast...unmovable in his conviction...unmovable in the truth of God's Word...and that was likely with the full knowledge of how dangerous life was about to become for him. But that was Martin Luther...and his integrity.

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, from our first lesson...we don't know for sure if they were just kicking against the goads of what the government – specifically, King Nebuchadnezzar – was telling them they had to do (although they knew it was sinful), or if they were the only ones bold enough to act in defiance when everyone else was too scared to disobey and face the king's wrath, but they literally took a stand. King Nebuchadnezzar had ordered this massive statue of himself constructed, he instructed the people to bow down when they heard his royal music playing (with the added threat that those who did not would face the blazing furnace), and these three men – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – stood up and basically said, "No...do what you have to, but we will not kneel. ***We will not serve your gods or***

worship the image of gold you have set up.” They definitely displayed some backbone in their words and actions. They had integrity. They would remain steadfast to God’s Word, especially here, the 1st Commandment, **“You shall have no other gods.”**

Two well-known examples. Two great examples of integrity. Do you have the same? When it comes to God’s Word and what it says...when it comes to how you are applying God’s Word in your life, can you say you are displaying integrity? That you are unmovable or steadfast in the truth of God’s Word?

You know, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego...for them, they were feeling the pressure from the government (again, Nebuchadnezzar) to compromise their faith, defy God, and worship the king. Martin Luther, the pressure was coming from the church, from supposed true believers and spiritual leaders to retract and recant his statements, turn his back on the truth of God’s Word, and bend knee to the Pope and the false teachings the Roman Catholic Church was peddling.

Where’s the pressure coming from for you? Today, I think we are being very much influenced by our culture and by society, and that’s where the temptation comes from to lose integrity.

For example, I know I’ve shared some stuff with you before from the website The Babylon Bee, which serves as a satirical, pseudo-Christian news site, or, as our President might say, Christian “fake” news. Anyways, a few months ago, headline from The Babylon Bee showed up on my Facebook timeline. In keeping with the Reformation theme, it read: **“Progressive Evangelical Leaders Meet To Affirm Doctrine Of ‘Sola Feels’ “**

Do you get it? We’re saved by grace alone, through faith in Jesus alone, a message given to us by Scripture alone. And now, according to the article, our emotions and our feelings, or the “feels,” are the supreme authority in all matters of theology and practice. The article says, **“Thus, things that make us feel bad, those are wrong. The things that give us all the happy feels, those are true, right, and good.”**

Obviously, we would say that’s ridiculous. But what do our practices or our actions or our words say about “sola feels”?

“We’re living together and sleeping together outside of marriage because it feels right and natural. We feel like we’re already married in God’s eyes.” But what does God’s Word say? “I feel it’s not my place to tell that person what they’re doing is wrong. They’re doing what they feel is right for them; it’s not my place to judge, so I won’t.” But what does God’s Word say? “I feel like we’re being too strict with this whole joining other churches for prayer services, mission trips, stuff like that. I think we need to loosen up what we’re teaching, and I think we’ll reach far more people. So many other churches are doing it!” You know, I guess we could say what goes hand in hand with feelings is our logic, right, what do I think? But again, what does God’s Word say?

And the list goes on. Cursing, swearing, using God’s name in vain when you’re angry or maybe even just as part of your normal conversing...feels good. Looking at pornography...feels good. Belittling, making a complete mockery of the government when you’re not in favor of their actions...feels good. Making promises and breaking them when it’s not convenient for you anymore...feels good. Getting the skinny on what’s going in the lives of others, delighting in hearing their problems, sharing those rumors with others...feels good. Making God’s Word and worshiping him more of a “yeah, it’s great when I get there, but if something else comes up, no big deal if I skip,” than a “this is what I need for my life and for my faith in Jesus.” Again, what does God’s Word say?

What does it say about us and our integrity? In our Sunday morning Bible class, that's been the one commonality between all the different "Christian" church bodies we've been studying...they've lost their integrity. They start with what they want to believe, because their heart or their mind is telling them this is what's right, and they bend God's Word to their will or massage it to line up with their beliefs. Have you done the same?

Surrounded by a world that would let emotions and logic drive their lives, it's tempting at times, and we give in to that kind of thinking instead of focusing on the clear truths of God's Word. We lose our integrity and waver from the clear and solid foundation of God's Word. And you know what? Forget being excommunicated by the Roman pope. Forget being thrown into a blazing furnace. How about sent out of God's family and being banned from heaven and being thrown into the blazing fires of hell for eternity?!? If it was "sola us," if it was up to us alone, that would be our fate.

But this Reformation Sunday, as we begin the season of End Times in the church, we can look forward to the end and Christ's return with eager anticipation and not fearful dread, like many will or even like we probably should. And here's why. Listen to what the three men in our sermon text said, ***"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us..."***

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they had integrity. They remained true to God's Word, were about to face a terrible punishment for it, and yet they continued to put their trust in God. They didn't say, "God, we did what you wanted us to. Now you have to save us." No, whether God decided to rescue them or not, their faith in him was fully resigned to his will.

And God did rescue them. And God has rescued you and me as well. In spite of the times we compromise our faith, or when we think or feel we know better than God, for the times we've shown a lack of integrity for God, he's rescued us...because of his grace. Because of Jesus.

And Jesus had integrity. There's no doubt about that. Can you think of some examples? How about the way he lived? After his baptism, when he was in the wilderness, there was the devil, "Well Jesus, I know you're feeling hungry. Stop your fast and turn these stones into bread." And Jesus answered and refused the temptation with God's Word. And he did that with the next two temptations from Satan as well. And his entire life was in line with God's will. He never strayed. He never faltered.

Or think about the way he died. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as he prayed, his final words? "Not my will, but yours be done (O God)." And the fact Jesus could have called down legions of angels to prevent his arrest, he could have lied to the chief priest and teachers of the law and said he wasn't God to avoid what lay ahead, he could have simply made it so Pilate would release him, he could have come down to the cross. But he didn't. He knew it was the way, the only way for our sins to be forgiven, and so he went.

And then think about how he rose. He didn't give death the last say. Jesus rose so that God's Word would come true for you and me...that ***"whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."***

That's integrity. What's impossible for any human to do – achieve our own salvation – Jesus did for us...willingly and faithfully. And that's the message of Reformation – we are saved by grace alone, God's undeserved love displayed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. We are saved through faith alone, as God makes us his children, gives us the Holy Spirit, moves us to believe and trust in him. We are saved by Scripture alone, God's Word which gives us the good news of our Savior and his love for us.

Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word! That's the only way we can maintain our integrity today, no matter what outside influences (or even inside, with our sinful nature) might be pressuring us. It's God keeping us steadfast.

And as he does, here's what our integrity looks like. You and I are not ashamed of the gospel. We don't have to prop it up good works, like the Roman Catholic Church was teaching in Luther's day and continues to do today. We don't fluff it up, either, like let's focus on entertaining people and then water down the message to have more mass appeal.

We have integrity in the face of potential persecution, whatever form that might take, like people making fun of you, or having this very real strain forming in even family relationships because you know your relationship to God supersedes any relationship he's given you here.

We have Integrity, which is why our church can and will continue to stand firm and say no to living together or having sex before marriage, no to homosexuality, no to abortion and no to other prevalent topics where the world wants compromise and tolerance. We will continue to say no to open communion, no to softening the roles of men and women, no to discarding our beliefs on fellowship for the good of joining other church bodies in work that's touted as being for the good of the gospel, when in reality it's not at all. And we'll say yes to making it our goal to live for Jesus every moment and to be his witnesses and share the gospel throughout the world. We will not compromise the truth of God's Word. Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word!

Now, the truth is we might get roasted for it, and it might get a little hot (nowhere near as uncomfortable as it was for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)...it might make you sweat a bit. But whether God decides to rescue you from particular hardship at that time or at all, we can and will fully resign our faith to his will and his love...knowing that no matter what happens here, we have eternity in heaven waiting for us.

April 15, 1521. 496 years, 6 months, 12 days. An important day, when one man, Martin Luther, spurred on by God's Word and moved by God himself, refused to lose his integrity. 500 years later, we're thankful for that. But we rejoice even more that someone greater than Luther, Jesus, refused to lose his integrity but instead lived and died and rose for us. We owe our eternity to him for that.

And, for the next 500 years, even just the rest of our lives, here's our prayer to God, "Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word. Lord, help us have integrity for your Word. Lord, help us stay firmly entrenched in your Word." And he will. Amen.