

WELCOME AND NOTICES

Please sign up for the Lent Course, which will be starting on Tuesday 8th March. We will be studying the Lent Course 'The Long Road to Heaven' based on the film 'The Way' with Martin Sheen in which he walks to Camino de Santiago for his son. The Lent Course is based on the theme of salvation. If you would like to attend the group, it will help if you have a copy of the book, which costs between £5-6. Don't let finances stop you from coming.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

- ¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
- ² Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
- ³ For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.
- ⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
- ⁷ for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

OPENING PRAYER AND CONFESSION

Most holy God, we bow down and worship you, along with all the company of heaven, for you created the world in your power and you saved us by your mercy through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Accept now our worship and our offering of praise, for to you belongs all glory, honour, power and praise. **Amen.**

I confess to God Almighty and in the presence of all God's people that I have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and I pray God Almighty to have mercy on me.

May Almighty God have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins and give you time to amend your life.
Amen.

We confess to God Almighty and in the presence of all God's people that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and we pray God Almighty to have mercy on us.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

May Almighty God have mercy on us, pardon and deliver us from all our sins and give us time to amend our lives.
Amen.

SONGS: Amazing Grace (my chains are gone)
King of Love and Grace (Guardian)
Even when the waters rise (Kingdom Come)

5th SUNDAY GIVING: NORWICH YOUTH FOR CHRIST

<https://vimeo.com/247815850>

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Eternal God, we come with these gifts to offer the praise of our lips and the service of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We pray for the work of Norwich Youth for Christ, and ask for wisdom for Nick Blanch and his team as they work among the young people of this city. Guide their steps by your Spirit and give them courage and boldness to reach out in ever new ways. So we ask you to bless their work and these gifts, for your kingdom's sake.
Amen.

PRAYER FOR SUNDAY CLUB

Lord, just as we pray for young people, so we pray for our own children and teenagers here in this church, that they may come close to you today, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

SONG: Thank You for Saving me

READING: Daniel 3:1, 13-25

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon...

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

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your

Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude towards them changed. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² 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, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴ Then 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, Your Majesty.' ²⁵ 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.'

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

REFLECTION: MAKING SENSE OF THE TIMES (3) No other god can save in this way

One evening this week Mandy and I sat down to watch Call the Midwife, the BBC series set in Poplar, East London in the 1960's. In this week's episode a father-to-be told the resident doctor, Dr Turner, about his time in Auschwitz and how he had lost his mother, father and younger brother in the concentration camp. Although the show is just a TV drama, the situation it conveyed was a terrible reality for 6 million people, and was simply down to their ethnicity as Jews.

In our story from Daniel 3, a story well worth taking the time to read the whole chapter, we have three Jewish young men, Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Daniel is not mentioned. This is a story not unlike the story of the holocaust, but on a much smaller scale. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold 90 feet high and 9 feet wide and called for everyone to bow down to it when they heard the sound of the 'horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music' (v5). Whoever did not bow down in worship would be thrown into a fiery furnace (v6). Of course the three Jewish men refused to do so. They were not the first and not the last Jewish men to offend the sensitivities of a foreign ruler. Their unwillingness to live by other people's conventions and expectations, in other words their Jewish distinctiveness, was a sure-fire way to garner mistrust and hatred. And here in this story we see there were those 'yes men' of the king who were more than willing to let Nebuchadnezzar know about unwillingness of these three to bow down

in worship to the statue and get Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into trouble.

The king was outraged that these three Jewish men, whom he had raised up to provincial administration in his kingdom, would not do as he decreed. However, the king looks rather foolish in this story, and almost himself becomes an object of fun. In some ways the story is rather funny, almost like a pantomime in the way it plays out. Yet the story is also deadly serious. The idea of dying because you stand up for the truth about God and stand up to a bullying and foolish king was not a theoretical idea for Jews. The seriousness of the situation is not lost on Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They declared, "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" (v16-18). What a wonderful faith-filled response. They knew that God could save them, and even if he didn't, their minds were not going to change. They were utterly devoted to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, David and the prophets, and no king would take Yahweh's place. They would stay committed to God whether or not he saved them, because they knew he is the true and living God.

So, what can we take from this story? The first thing is that we may be told that we too should worship and serve other gods (which are not gods), the gods of money, status and power, for example. We may

be challenged as to why we are not willing to bow down to these other gods. In a country which is increasingly secularised and increasingly detached from its Christian moorings, don't be surprised when people mock you or get angry because you will not bow down to their gods. Remember what Peter wrote in his first letter. "But even if you suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:14-15). Think of how Christ responded when he was threatened and beaten. Again Peter writes, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Let's remain faithful to the Lord.

The second thing we can take from this story concerns how God saves us. Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed at the end of the story, 'No other god can save in this way,' when the three friends emerged from their ordeal totally unharmed. They trusted God, and even if they had died, they would only serve him. No other god can save us from sin and death and hell. But Jesus can and has through his death and resurrection.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego remained faithful and experienced the salvation of the Lord. If you are going through difficult times, by all means pray for deliverance, but know that God might not rescue you from your circumstances. Whether he rescues you or not, let's bow

down to him and acknowledge him as the only true God worthy of worship.

PRAYERS

O Lord our God, Lord of the past, present and future, in this week where Holocaust Memorial Day was celebrated and we remember that six million Jews were murdered in the holocaust. We also remember other groups and ethnicities who have been killed in subsequent genocides. We pray for Jews and others around the world who still suffer discrimination and threats because of their ethnicity. As with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, we remember all those who stand up for their faith in you. We pray for the small number of Jewish Christians in the Middle East, that their faith in you, Lord, would be an example to both Jews and Muslims in that region. We pray for Christians and Christian leaders across the Middle East, for continuing courage in the face of opposition.

We pray for the Church worldwide, for unity in diversity, for tolerance and love. We thank you that Christian leaders across Asia are taking a more prominent role in the global body of Christ.

Lord, we pray for the world, for better relations between Russia and Ukraine and the Western world. We pray that Ukraine may be able to determine its own path, and more importantly that this episode in its history would cause many to turn to you in both countries.

We pray for issues closer to home. We pray for the government, for truth, justice and compassion to be at the heart of their policies. Lord, give us leaders who will serve for the sake of your name and your

kingdom and restore our reputation abroad.

We pray for the NHS and the weariness many feel who work within it. Strengthen them in the task before them. We pray for all those waiting for treatment, all those undergoing treatment, all those recovering from treatment, and all those for whom treatment has come too late. We remember those known to us. We pray for all those who have recently lost loved ones, continuing to remember in particular Linda, Carol and Pam.

Finally, Lord, we pray for ourselves and for all the issues facing us. Help us to trust you for today and tomorrow, and know we can rely on you for you are faithful now and always.

We make these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, who through His life, death, and resurrection, journeys with us into the eternal hope of Your truth and light.
Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

SONG: Everyone Needs Compassion
(Mighty to Save)

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His love endures for ever.

The Lord is at my side; I will not fear.

The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

If the Lord is for me,

Who can be against me?

Our help is in the name of the Lord,

The Maker of heaven and earth.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His love endures for ever.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and with all whom you love now and for evermore. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.