

Today is a day of amazing stories, stories about heroes, stories about the faith of heroes and their **Fiery Confessions** that put their lives in danger but ultimately changed the world forever.

That may seem a little odd for a Sunday where the theme for the day is “Safely Home in His Word,” but not really. To be safely home in the Word of God doesn’t refer to sitting at home where it’s safe doing nothing. Quite the opposite. Being “at home” with the Word inherently means being at conflict with others who by nature were born with rebellion against God in their hearts. But being at home with the Word of God also means being able to face that conflict and recognizing that you are safe because you are on the right side of the conflict—God’s side. What did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego say? *“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.”*

Martin Luther, like other prominent figures in the Reformation that would follow him, faced the very real threat of being burned at the stake as heretics. Indeed, it had happened to John Hus before Martin Luther, and it would happen to others for nearly a century to follow. But what did Martin Luther say when ordered by Emperor Charles V to give a simple yes-or-no answer to the question of whether or not he would reject all the things he had written about the gospel of Christ?

Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right

to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.

Maybe that causes you to think a little bit about whether or not you have the guts to hold to a fiery confession. Maybe you don’t have a fiery personality or you don’t especially like conflict.

Well, who says Luther or the three men in the furnace had fiery personalities. Fiery personalities weren’t necessary for the roles that God gave them to play in the world. All that was needed was their fiery confession, which was more the result of what God was doing than something that they would have done themselves as a result of their particular personalities.

A fiery confession—assuming that by “fiery confession,” we mean a godly confession and not just the words of someone who enjoys conflict—is not at all the result of a person’s inborn personality. A true confession, that is, a confession that is fueled by the fire of the Spirit and not just a love of debate, can come from any one of us at any time, so long as we speak from the Word of God and the fire that the Spirit put in us at our baptisms.

Indeed, what I’d like for all of us to see this morning is that fiery confessions aren’t about you and me. Fiery confessions aren’t about Martin Luther, John Hus, or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In fact, what makes fiery confessions so fiery is that the confessions themselves are the refining fire of Christ that the last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, had prophesied about: *“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. ...So I will come near for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty*” (Malachi 3:2, 5).

Do you see what that’s saying? We celebrate the Reformation year after year and sometimes we even call it Luther’s Reformation. But the Reformation wasn’t really about Martin Luther. It was about the power of his confession, which, by definition, is

really about someone else. Confessions by definition are agreeing with something that someone else says, not about your personal opinions. So it's not Luther's Reformation; it's Christ's. Likewise, what made Luther's bold confession that I read earlier so fiery was not the broken little monk's personality but the rather the fire of the Spirit that led him to seek the safety of the Word of God rather than trying to find refuge in the shifting sands of human opinions ("for I do not trust either in the pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves").

The same goes for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The most noteworthy fire in their story is not the fire from the furnace that was so hot that it killed the guards who tossed them in. The most noteworthy fire in their story is the fire of the Spirit who stoked the flame of their fiery confession: *"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."*

Now, Christians, where is your fire? Was it the fire of the Spirit that was stoked when we talked about the gospel of Christ being more important than all your money and all your things? Or was it the fire of anger and rebellion against the truths of God's Word? Did your love of hunting get you stuck on the fact that I sounded like I might be saying that you have to be in church on the morning of the first day of hunting season, or did your love of the truth help you to hear that it truly was possible to worship anywhere without rebelling against God's will but that if Christ were to issue such a command it might well reveal where your heart truly was?

Where is your fire? Is your confession fiery like Luther's, or fiery like the devil's?

Oh, dear brothers and sisters, if questions like that ever bother you, then there is only one thing we can do: Repent. Repent and believe the good news!

Good news, brothers and sisters! That's what this whole day is

about! Reformation Day isn't about the self-confidence that Martin Luther demonstrated in 1521 when he made his lonely stand against the Emperor. Man, that's really missing the message. The point of Reformation Day is the good news that we never stand alone when we stand on Jesus' promise of forgiveness and salvation.

Likewise, today is not about the bravery that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were able to drum up out of themselves as they made their lonely stand against King Nebuchadnezzar. That's totally missing it! Today is about the promise of God that is more powerful than earthly fire. Today is about standing in the middle of persecution and danger, sin and death, and saying, "I'm not strong enough to stand against this on my own. And I really don't know if my God will spare me of this or not. But I do know that God is all-powerful and that, according to his unbreakable Word, the waters of my baptism have quenched the fire of his anger against my sins through the power of Jesus' sacrifice. So if I must suffer through the fire of trial, I know I will not do it alone. And I know that it will only be because the Lord has planned blessing through it for me and for others who witness it."

Look into that furnace, brothers and sisters. You will not see three strong men of impressive fortitude. You will find three weak sinners walking around in a horribly deadly fire. You will see three weak sinners standing by one powerful God.

Here's the truth. You don't drum up a fiery confession out of yourself, so stop thinking that you're not strong enough or not brave enough or not smart enough to make a stand like Martin Luther or the three men in our text. Fiery confessions don't come from men like that and they don't come from you. Fiery confessions come from the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God comes from the Word of Christ's forgiveness. And you know what? I forgive you your sin and weakness for Jesus' sake.

That truth conquers all. It may not spare you all, but it conquers all. It conquers all because those with the forgiveness of God on their side never stand alone in their confession. They stand with him—forever. Amen.