

Sermon Daniel 3 13-26 and Romans 8 18-25

God gave Moses a set of rules to live by.; just ten and they are ten basic rules that are sound and simple for us to live by. In our present-day society, we may easily think that there are new sets of rules; rules that make life easier; rules that are not rules; things that take away our attention on to things that are only meant to give us pleasure; we are bombarded with ways to gain material goodies. We are encouraged even at this early stage to be buying this or that and to be going here and there. (Yes, we are going on a cruise next week! Have we too been sucked into that culture of book it now while there are plenty of offers?) We are enticed to buy this treat or that outfit. We are at present a throwaway society and the gods of our society are the temptations of consumerism.

From the word go, the Jewish people have been instructed to worship just one God; the God of Abraham and of Isaac. That has been an ongoing problem with God's chosen people – they just won't listen. Even as Moses was coming down the mountain with the two tablets of stone, God's chosen people; the people that God had freed from slavery; the God who had fed them in

the desert, were making idols; they were making graven images to bow down to. And so it goes on from there!

The first of the rules brought down by Moses are all about having just one God and worshiping no idols yet here they are again with Nebuchadnezzar who has just made a massive image that all his people were to bow down to. Well it just was not what God wanted. Just one God and no graven images; no idols. And Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not going to go against the fundamental ten rules by which their faith is built on. Others can say that they are not doing what they are meant to be doing but they, the servants of God, will not change; they will stand firm by their faith and will live or die knowing that what they do is the right thing.

All through history we hear of people who have principles and they are not going to go back on the pledges that they have made. They have been prepared to be burnt at the stake rather than recant on their beliefs. They were willing to die for what they believed was right Their faith has seen them through tough times and they are strong because of that. They would have given a stronger message to the surrounding people because they were setting an example to others. Yes, they die but they died

standing firm to the fundamentals of their faith; a martyr's death. We were given an excellent example this morning from David with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. But if they had bowed down to what the others were advocating they would have shown themselves as lesser people. Better to die keeping the faith than to bend and change when you know what is right yet do not have the stamina to stand firm. They were willing to give up their lives. For some they know what is right and stand firm even when their faith is so often under fire.

'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 your image of gold you have set up.' So there you have it in a nugget so to speak! I have standards and I will stand firm and nothing that you make me do will take me away from what I know is right and proper even if I have to pay the ultimate price.

Nebuchadnezzar, from the very beginning, seems intent on fulfilling a grand objective. He wants not only to establish a great kingdom, but it seems he envisioned a world empire; just as Bonhoeffer wanted to stop the

despot of Hitler. He hoped, like all ambitious despots and Satan, who stands behind them, to rule the world. They make up their rules as they go along and there is no backbone in them.

And Nebuchadnezzar heated the fire to be so much hotter; so much so that the people throwing in Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were killed by the heat; but what of them?...What of the strongest soldiers? Are some sucked in along the way – some innocent, essentially good enough people – just to keep the peace?

But times are changing. As we have just heard from our New Testament reading from Romans The old ways are giving way to the new ways. In Paul's turbulent day he was saying that he was living in the throes of giving birth to the new creation. How fresh and new is this reading even for today's world. Many are now not so quick to criticise what they don't understand. When does standing firm become intransigence? There's just the Trumps of this world who still bury their heads in the sand and say that things can always be the same and any change is purely accidental. I cannot stop thinking of that one player in American NFL who was prepared to kneel when the national anthem played. He was wanting to raise a

debate over race and brutality. It takes a brave person to do that; as a matter of principle; he was making a statement. He is now without a team. And others are now doing the same. Yet Trump is making them to be thrown out of their squads. Now white people are doing the same. Times are changing and more people are standing up (or is it kneeling down!) for what they know is right. That people can no longer be walked over. The Trump tower will come crashing down if it is built on foundations of corruption and empty words.

How right Paul is when he says in Romans that the Spirit helps us overcome. We can be liberated – just like those three servants of God – even if they die, they said, they are liberated. They can only hope... For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. They had faith that God would be there with them and even though they did not know for sure they had hope that God would save them.

There were not three in that furnace but four – we none of us walk alone. If what you are saying or doing you know is right and is from good intentions then no matter

how rocky the road is; how steep the challenge is; how difficult the task is, God will be by your side, keeping you from the heat – if we can stand firm in our faith.