

Courage, Even in the Fire  
A Sermon for Pilgrim Church  
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash  
June 11, 2023 (Pride Sunday)

We have a beautiful scripture reading today, Pilgrims.

Let us ponder a story of courage.

Let us wonder at bravery, even in the fire.

Let us witness something inside, so strong.<sup>1</sup>

Let us gather up all the passion and authenticity and determination of these three.

Let us hear of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego surviving the fire.

But first you might want to know a bit about the Book of Daniel.

The New Interpreter's Bible tells us that Daniel wrote words of encouragement for the Jewish people when they were under the control of foreign powers. Stories of "surviving and flourishing in a foreign land in a hostile environment."<sup>2</sup>

"Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah..." (Daniel 1:6). Their names weren't Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Isn't it a puzzle that Daniel, writing stories of courage to an oppressed Jewish people, would call them by the names the King imposed upon them? It's a puzzle.

---

<sup>1</sup> Something Inside So Strong is a 1987 song by Labi Siffre, inspired by the anti-apartheid resistance movement in South Africa and covered by many groups including The Flirtations, an LGBT a cappella group. The Flirtations' recording was the soundtrack for my writing of this sermon. .

<sup>2</sup> New Interpreter's Bible p. 21

It's the context of Daniel, because he's telling the stories of people whose identities were stolen by people in power. But Daniel is telling stories of courage and commitment and community and resistance. "One of the ways we see Jewish resistance to the symbols of powerlessness in the exile and afterwards is in the telling of stories of Jewish courage in the face of tremendous foreign power."<sup>3</sup> The same commentator tells us to watch for how Daniel is also a story of creative nonviolent resistance - spiritual, social, political resistance.

Let us listen to bravery, even in the fire.

Let us witness something inside, so strong.<sup>4</sup>

Listen for God's word of courage *for us, this day*.

And this is a long reading, so I'm going to break it up a little, and I wonder if you might also help me. When you hear the names of the three brave ones, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - that is to say, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, I'm going to ask you to call out for them, COURAGE! And when you hear the name of the oppressive king Nebuchadnezzar, give him any feedback you want. Wanna try that?

They had been asked to bow down in front of the King's 90 foot tall gold idol, and their faith was so strong they would not bow. And here our reading begins. Listen for God's word to you in Daniel chapter 3.

### Daniel 3:16-28

*16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - that is to say, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, - answered the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. <sup>17</sup>If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let God deliver us. <sup>18</sup>But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will*

---

<sup>3</sup> New Interpreter's Bible p. 31

<sup>4</sup> "Something Inside So Strong" is a 1987 song by Labi Siffre, inspired by the anti-apartheid resistance movement in South Africa and covered by many groups including The Flirtations.

*not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.'*

O that's courage. That's strength. That's faith.

That's Something inside so strong  
They know that they can make it.

They stand together against a bully; against empire.

They stand together and there is strength in their solidarity. And they stand up against Nebuchadnezzar's oppression.

*19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - that is to say Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah - that his face was distorted.*

Let me just pause in the reading here to wonder if any of us have known a powerful leader to get so upset when their power is resisted - when their orders are not followed - that their face becomes distorted. Have you ever? I mean, that right there is as scary to me as a fiery furnace. I would do just about anything to calm Nebuchadnezzar down and get him out of my face and out of my business. But Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, stood calmly.

They are told there were only two ways it could go. They could change who they were - assimilate and pass. They could take the names Empire imposed upon them and bow down to the king's idol. Or they could die in the fire. But they believe in a God whose love is stronger than death, stronger than fire. And Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, stand calm,

courageous, true to themselves and true to their faith. They know there was a third possibility.

*Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace to be heated up seven times more than was customary,<sup>20</sup> and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - that is to say Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah - and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire.*

*<sup>21</sup>So the men were bound, still wearing their tunics, their trousers, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. <sup>22</sup>Because the king's command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that is to say, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.*

*<sup>23</sup>But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.*

*24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counselors, 'Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?' They answered the king, 'True, O king.'<sup>25</sup>He replied, 'But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.'*

Four people! Let me pause there. Four figures in the furnace. Who's the fourth?

(pause for replies)

Yes that's true. God is right there in the flames with them. It's like Isaiah who told us when we walk through the fire, we will not be burned because God is there.

Now back to it....

*<sup>26</sup>Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High*

*God, come out! Come here!’ So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that is to say, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, came out from the fire. <sup>27</sup> And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them.*

*<sup>28</sup> Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that is to say, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who has sent their angel and delivered her servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king’s command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.*

They will not conform. They stand up to the king and the powers, and bring about change. They change their world, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that is to say, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

One: Here ends the reading. Hear what the Spirit of God is saying to the church.

All: Thanks be to God.

So here is the sermon, and it’s a sermon for Pride Sunday, and it is for every one of us who does not fall into Empire’s imposed categories.

If you go through fire,  
Know that God is there.  
Be of good courage.

Be true to who you are.

And know that God is there.  
And we are there together.

And our courage and joy will change the world.

Something inside so strong  
We know that we can make it  
Though they're doing us wrong, so wrong  
They thought that our pride was gone, oh no  
There's something inside so strong  
Oh, something inside so strong.<sup>5</sup>

May it be so.

Amen.

Labi Siffre: Something Inside So Strong  
Full Lyrics:

The higher you build your barriers  
The taller I become  
The further you take my rights away  
The faster I will run  
You can deny me, you can decide  
To turn your face away  
No matter 'cause there's

Something inside so strong  
I know that I can make it  
Though you're doing me wrong, so wrong  
You thought that my pride was gone, oh no  
There's something inside so strong  
Oh, something inside so strong

---

<sup>5</sup> Labi Siffre, Something Inside So Strong

The more you refuse to hear my voice (ooh-weh ooh-weh ooh-weh ooh-weh)

The louder I will sing

You hide behind walls of Jericho (ooh-weh ooh-weh ooh-weh ooh-weh)

Your lies will come tumbling

Deny my place in time, you squander wealth that's mine

My light will shine so brightly it will blind you

Because there's

Something inside so strong, strong

I know that I can make it

Though you're doing me wrong, so wrong

You thought that my pride was gone, oh no

There's something inside so strong

Oh, something inside so strong

Brothers and sisters

When they insist we're just not good enough

Well we know better

Just look him in his eyes and say

We're gonna do it anyway

We're gonna do it anyway

There's something inside so strong

And I know that I can make it

Though you're doing me wrong, so wrong

You thought that my pride was gone, oh no

There's something inside so strong, oh

Something inside so strong

Brothers and sisters

When they insist we're just not good enough

Well we know better

Just look him in his eyes and say

We're gonna do it anyway

We're gonna do it anyway  
We're gonna do it anyway  
We're gonna do it anyway  
Because there's

Something inside so strong, (something inside so strong)  
I know that I can make it  
Though you're doing me wrong, so wrong  
You thought that my pride was gone, oh no, oh no  
There's something inside so strong  
Something inside so strong (oh oh yeah)  
I know that I can make it  
Though you're doing me wrong, so wrong  
You thought that my pride was gone, oh no, oh no  
There's something inside so strong

Oh oh, something inside so strong  
Oh oh, something inside so strong  
Oh oh, something inside so strong