

1. Creation Consciousness, Call Consciousness, Prophetic Consciousness
  - a. Now, in Advent, Awareness of God's Presence
2. Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel is a mistranslation of Nebuchadrezzar, who was the ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire from 605 to 561 BCE. Crushed Judah and Jerusalem in 597BC.
3. Daniel is looking back and retelling a story.
  - a. The Book of Daniel is something like an apocalyptic allegorical narrative.
4. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
  - a. They are friends, students, of Daniel, who has them appointed administrators of Babylon.
  - b. Think of Joseph as administrator of Egypt and you will get an idea of Daniel's position in the Babylonian empire.
5. SMA in the furnace (which happens before Daniel in the lion's den)
6. SMA are inspired by Daniel's stand against the edicts of the King.
  - a. Throughout the book, the royal court wants to rout Daniel out
  - b. Here they play on the decree to worship Neb's statue.
    - i. They take advantage of the King's ego.
7. This Story is a satire, a mockery of the King. All the neophytes and sycophants...
  - a. "Satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates, all the officials" all come to the dedication of a massive gold statue made of Neb. (vss 2-3)
    - i. *The biggest attendance in the history of the empire.*
    - ii. *The best bands and music – horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble of the people, the nations, and languages (vs 7)*
8. SMA do not honor the decree to bow down. (vs 12)
  - a. SMA do not feel the need to defend themselves because Daniel has been granted reprieve to worship God (vs 2:47)
9. SMA sentenced to die in the furnace

10. Think of the furnace like a threshold, between life and death, between hate and love, between loneliness and companionship, acquaintance & friendship, between obedience and resistance
  - a. These threshold places are liminal spaces (define liminal) a place where this world and the supernatural world come close, a thin place.
  - b. We don't arrive at thin places in good times, in easy things. But these threshold places exist in this in between space,
11. In the space between life and death, we think of them as either or,
  - a. When we talk about thresholds, we're talking about a gray area, not a hard barrier.
12. It's a boundary, but a fluid boundary: a transitional crossing point.
  - a. In the furnace, the binaries begin to break down.
    - i. Between living and dying
    - ii. Between natural and supernatural
    - iii. Between human and other creatures
    - iv. Between "You" and "Me" ("I" and "Thou" – Martin Buber)
13. We want our faith lives to be a yes and a no.
  - a. We want our relationships to accord to particular linear patterns.
  - b. We want our success to follow a clear map.
  - c. We want our grief, our love, our hope to go from Point A to a completion at Point B.
    - i. We expect others to follow the pattern that depends on *yes and no*.
14. The funeral director Caleb Wilde, from Lancaster PA, and author of *Confessions of a Funeral Director*, said:
  - a. love isn't math, there is no formula. 2+2 is a formula, but the only way we remember the value and presence of love is by continually doing it over and over and over.
  - b. When you're in the threshold, you're not in a formulaic place
    - i. you're not in the land of the living or the land of the dead,
      1. you're in a transitional place.
15. You can only know the presence of God by stepping into the threshold:
- 16.that is a faith move, not a confidence move.**

- a. A confidence move would be
  - i. MY GOD IS STRONG ENOUGH TO SAVE ME, HEAL ME, KEEP ME SAFE IN THE FURNACE
- 17. But that's not what S, M, A say" they say
  - a. This is where my commitment lies, to serve the Lord
    - i. Not whether God burns me up in the threshold or not.
      - 1. (vss 17-18)
- 18. S, M, A are saying
  - a. My Commitment to the Faith is far more important to me than any commitment to your empire.
  - b. You can threaten me any way you want, but I will not bow down to your authority.
    - i. THIS is why they get thrown into the furnace:
    - ii. they will not put their faith and their commitment second to the empire
- 19. Other words for Empire:  
reigning authority of the day
- 20. The reason S, M & A are sent to the furnace is they resist the reigning empire of the day, in this case the Chaldean Empire.
- 21. We want to read this story as a story of how a powerful God protects us
  - a. That is what we learned in Sunday school
  - b. but this is a mockery of all government authority, a mockery of any organization that would force someone to worship the authority the empire, government, state, holds over other people.
- 22. Furnace imagery,
  - a. it burns away the things that keep us from the threshold,
  - b. which is why in verse 22:
    - i. the heat of standing in the threshold burns away the things that can't stand in the threshold.
- 23. The other thing about that threshold space is:
  - a. we can't do it alone we need to know that people have gone before us,

- b. and we need to know that in doing so, something greater than us will be with us.
- 24. Our faith lives are not intended for comfort.
  - a. Our faith lives are intended to break through the things that keep us from God,
    - i. and that can be a hot place to stand.
- 25. The three friends stand there because they know that their mentor & friend Daniel has already stood there, and so S, M & A say (vss 17-18)
- 26. What this tells me is NOT that our God is stronger than your god,
  - a. it's that our commitment to our faith is not dependent on God's ability to save us.
    - i. Because this is NOT a story about God saving people
- 27. It's a story about how God stands with us in the threshold of difficult things
- 28. (vss 24-25) The fourth figure that stands with them is an angel/messenger of the Lord.
- 29. Advent, waiting for a messiah:
  - a. we don't wait for someone to overcome and conquer the world, like yet one more emperor, king, president, or dictator
  - b. No. We wait for someone to stand with us in the threshold, in the heat, in the struggle.
    - i. Martin Luther King Jr uses this story in the letter from the Birmingham jail
  - c. This is not a story about how God overcomes the heat of the furnace and saves us.
    - i. It's a story about how God is with us in the midst of things.
    - ii. Emmanuel, God with us, the coming of the Christ Child.
- 30. What are the ideas, the people, the circumstances, that can't sustain the heat of the threshold of faith in your life?
  - a. friends who are unwilling to stand by you,
  - b. family members who don't stand by you
    - i. We don't find out who our true friends are until things get difficult and hot,

ii. until we're in that threshold.

31. What do I want people to leave with: What's the hot place in your life? That were you to stand there, your faith is all that's left. Not who's right and who's wrong, not who has the better argument, not what do I get to keep here.

32. Here: our faith requires us to stand in hot, difficult place, these boundary spaces, and I would want them to know that in those places, there are people who have gone before them (like Daniel supports his friends), there are people who stand with them (SMA all stand together) and once there, there are stories showing that God is with us in those hot difficult places.

33. Examples we can follow

People we can rely on

In doing so, we become examples to others about the nature of the presence of God.

34. *Move to communion table*

35. At the Lord's Supper, we enter the threshold of the mystery of God's presence and stand together to partake of God's love by remembering Jesus' last supper with his friends...