

Trinity Sunday

A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger

on June 15, 2025

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 / Canticle 13 / Romans 5:1-5 / John 16:12-15

*May I speak, and may we all hear and learn,
through the power of the Triune God:
Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier.*

*We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and
endurance produces character, and character produces hope.*

Bearing in mind what Paul tells us about hope, I want to explore the canticle that we said /sang a moment ago. But it requires quite a bit of back story, so please bear with me.

Canticle 13, and Canticle 12 before it, are known as the *Song of the Three Young Men* or the *Prayer of Azariah*. Together they are text that was added to the Book of Daniel at some point in history. If you read The Saturday Email, you may have done some background research to see where Canticle 13 and Canticle 12 fit into Daniel. And I'm referring to them in this order because the text of Canticle 13 actually precedes the text of Canticle 12 in the Addition to Daniel. They're typically inserted after ch3 v23 and before v24. You can find the text of both Canticles on pp88-90 in the BCP.

So what's going on here? What compelled these 3 young men to recite this prayer? It was because of a vindictive and narcissistic king! Nebuchadnezzar bound these 3 young Jewish men and threw them into the furnace because they refused to worship a 90ft golden statue that the King of Babylon made of himself. It is at this point Canticles 13 and 12 are inserted into the text of Daniel after v23, beginning with:

*They walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and
blessing the Lord. Then Azariah stood still in the fire and prayed aloud. [Canticle 13]*

In the Greek text, the Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are exchanged for their Hebrew names: *Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah*.

With this prayer to God, the 3 Young Men were spared. The flames did not touch them, and they emerged from the furnace, accompanied by a Fourth, presumed to be an agent of God.

Astonished, King Nebuchadnezzar made a decree:

'Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.' Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Why this Canticle is set for Trinity Sunday as an option to replace the Psalm in all 3 Lectionary years remains a mystery to me, even after considerable research. It is clearly set in an OT context when there was no concept of the Holy Trinity. Yet, this text – these additions to the Book of Daniel – have been used liturgically in both the Eastern and Western Churches from an early age.

Perhaps it is the unwavering devotion to God that is to be an example for us on this day set aside to ponder the *mystery* of our Triune God: Three-in-One and One-in-Three. It is not for us to *question* the mystery of Godhead, but to *believe*. The 3 Young Men are exemplary models of the first of the 10 Commandments as written in Exodus 20:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.

Nebuchadnezzar was neither the first nor the last person to lure God's people's attention away from the One True God and toward himself. Many a charismatic, brash character has tried to divert our praise toward himself and demand allegiance.

Imagine being in a land where the ruler is so narcissistic that he creates a totem of himself and forces everyone to not only worship it, but he *summons* them to come and worship it. Imagine an autocratic ruler who demands sycophancy:

You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and their prayer illustrate to us where we need to go when faced with corrupt authority that we cannot control, change or even influence. When our values and morals are under attack, and only those forced to comply shall live, we need to turn to our faith. We need to turn to our Creator God who redeems us through the life, Death and Resurrection of His Son, and comforts and empowers us through the Gift of the Holy Spirit who will guide into all truth when the truth in our temporal world is difficult to find.

I gave some thought to the 21C equivalent of being bound and thrown into the furnace. The 20C version of that was literally being thrown into the furnace! During the Holocaust – which translates from Greek as *sacrifice by fire*. Some 21C equivalents I came up with were:

- Being wrongly deported and imprisoned in a country that routinely tortures prisoners.
- Being shot with a rubber bullet by authorities while reporting the news.
- Being wrestled to the ground, handcuffed and detained as a government official asking a question of another government official.
- Being discharged from the military because of a capricious ruling.
- Having your life threatened and your house and family surveiled as a judge who simply exercised their constitutional duty to protect the rule of law.
- Being threatened with deportation for exercising your right to free speech.
- Being subject to military aggression simply for exercising your right to peacefully protest against brutal and corrupt government actions.
- Being a lawmaker who is assassinated for having different political beliefs.

This is the 21C stuff to which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would say:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. 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 him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.

God comes first! God who created you comes first. God who redeemed you comes first. God who makes you holy comes first. Sometimes God coming first in your life takes courage. St John Chrysostom admired the courage of God coming first for the 3 Young Men:

*Do you see how difficult these struggles are made; how irresistible the snare; and how deep the gulf, and a precipice on either hand? **But be not afraid.** In whatever degree the enemy increases his machinations, so much the more does*

he display the courage of the young men ... But nothing dismayed them, neither the wrath of the king, nor their being left alone in the midst of so many, nor the sight of the fire, nor the sound of the trumpet, nor the whole multitude looking fire at them; for deriding all these things, as if they were about to be cast into a cool fountain of water, they entered the furnace uttering that blessed sentence, "We will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up." ¹

So, we turn again to St Paul's words:

We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

The Song of the 3 Young Men and our Offertory Hymn, *St Patrick's Breastplate*, are expressions of the foundation of that hope, expressions of unwavering devotion to God, to be prayed at all times, but especially in times when we refuse to join the corruption, and feel powerless to stop it.

Chrysostom again:

I have not referred to this history without reason, but that you may learn that whether it be the wrath of a king, or the violence of soldiers, or the envy of enemies, or captivity, or destitution, or fire, or furnace, or ten thousand terrors, nothing will avail to put to shame or terrify a righteous person.

God is on our side, and we have to be on God's side: that righteous person. It's easy to give in, to be complacent or to seemingly not care. But we have been sent the Spirit of truth to guide us into all truth. And that truth shall set us free.

When we are on God's side:

*We have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.*

So we pray as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did, as St Patrick did, and we live in hope.

¹ John Chrysostom Homily 4 on the Statues

... and **hope** does not disappoint us, because **God's love** has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

And there is the Holy Trinity: the God of Love; the God of Peace; the God of Hope.

Here's something to ponder: Nebuchadnezzar was not a Jew. In fact, he destroyed the first Temple in Jerusalem and took the Nation of Israel into captivity in Babylon. But, in Daniel ch4 – having had a psychedelic dream after witnessing the power of the God of Israel in the faith *demonstrated* by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – Nebuchadnezzar abruptly converted, or so it seems. The power of the God who creates, redeems and empowers does wonders! The God who is Love, Peace and Hope does miracles! And if we continue to *faithfully demonstrate* the faith we sing in the Song of the 3 Young Men – and praise Him and highly exalt Him for ever – maybe, just maybe, there may be hope for us².

Canticle 13 – Song of the Three Young Men, 29-34

Glory to you, Lord God of our fathers; * you are worthy of praise; glory to you.

Glory to you for the radiance of your holy Name * we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

Glory to you in the splendor of your temple; * on the throne of your majesty, glory to you.

Glory to you, seated between the Cherubim; * we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

Glory to you, beholding the depths; * in the high vault of heaven, glory to you.

Glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; * we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

² The Conversion of Nebuchadnezzar – Saint Thomas Church <https://share.google/pMJkuOHF8XpSsvLus>