Dec. 3, 2017 Daniel: The Fiery Furnace Daniel 3:1, [2-7] 8-30 (John 18:36-37) Liturgical color: Blue **PRAYER OF THE DAY God of fiery flames, Even the most raging fire could not destroy your servants when they called upon you in faith. Give us faith to withstand anything that rages to deter us from following you. Amen.**

ADVENT – PRAY, BREATHE, DRINK DEEPLY… word made flesh… PRAISE deeply, all heart

**Announcements: prayers**

Thanks for ‘Life begins at 75! welcome new member Linda Shott

Vespers next Sunday; music ministry appreciation Barbara Wenrich (hospital/hospice)

Congregational meeting today all under the weather incl Charlotte Sw.

**Gospel** John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

 37 Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

**Children’s message:**

 Daniel? PRAY to GOD #1, ~~Ella sing JC loves me?~~ Call by different names… that’s not me… similar for God… there is one God… don’t worship king! Silly cucumber!

Ezekiel? – BREATHE deep BONES – Cocoa movie photo? Dancing bones, remembered but no life without God’s breath

Isaiah – DRINK – thirsty for Bible… thirsty for Word, waiting… parched… coming soon!

John – WORD, here is answer to prayer and one to whom we pray; here is life (in him we live and move and have our being); here is word in person! Beverages, be filled!

Adidas has a slogan “All in or nothing”… “All in or nothing” is also a perfect slogan for our compact Advent season this year. We only have 4 Sundays, and 3 weeks! All in to Pray deeply, Breathe deeply, Drink of God’s word deeply, and Praise the Word Incarnate deeply! Today, pray deeply, has everyone in the passage from Daniel… All in!

* The exemplary exiles are “all in”
	+ All in the furnace… shoes, clothes, hats and all
	+ All in, nowhere to return since their home- the city of Jerusalem was destroyed;
	+ All in even their names reflecting their religious identities were taken from them;
		- instead of “God is gracious” - Hananiah, “Who is like God?” - Mishael, and “God keeps him” - Azariah.[[1]](#footnote-1)
		- “These references to the God of Israel have now been substituted with references to the Babylonian gods, such as Nebo -- Abednego means “servant of Nego” (*could be intentionally misspelled*) And Daniel’s name Belteshazzar, referred to the Babylonian god ‘Marduk’ {Bel}
		- Even the King’s name Nebuchadnezzar means: “May Nebo protect my boundary” [[2]](#footnote-2)
	+ these best and the brightest… were at the mercy of the king, death threats were made even though the conquering king believed in these people enough to send them to… 3 years of adult continuing education training!
	+ Their food/diet was completely changed from vegetarian and water to meat and wine… almost… until God interceded (Dan 1:9ff)…
	+ And yet these young men strove for the welfare of the city in which they found themselves and they were “all in!”. After another death threat Daniel was able to interpret the King’s dream about a giant statue being toppled referring to the eventual toppling of King Nebby’s Babylonian empire… and got promoted with his 3 friends close-behind, which may be why only 3 were there for the furnace ordeal. After the dream experience, King Nebby K. Nezer ☺ exclaims “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings “ (Dan 2:47).

According to our reading; immediately after this event the king set-up a huge golden statue to be worshipped in his honor! Everyone was commanded to be all in… Babylonians and their prisoners of war including God’s chosen people from Jerusalem.

1. The king threatened everyone with death, again - this time, in a furnace
2. Ironic that king nebby would build a statue (a needle?) so soon after his worst nightmares were interpreted starting with a huge statue with a golden head!
	1. Listens and sees God’s wisdom & power… yet anger rules the day
3. King Nebby is ALL IN! The Furnace so Hot … kills king’s men; bindings so tight… rage filled urgent execution, everyone is watching at this dedication All about King Nebby.
4. One may wonder, if all the Music, is a refrain of harmony of discord?

To consider this, let’s look deeply at verses 17-18. In the midst of over-the-top crisis, in front of a huge crowd, and a very powerful ruler of the world-power empire… Rack, Shack, and Benny (vegi tales) Are All in! Not All in fear, not all in shock, not all in desperation, not all in despair… No, they are all in for the God who King Nebby is trying to strip from them. AND it’s important to note, that Rack, Shack, and Benny are NOT All In for themselves… They are All IN God’s hands

“17 *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.

 18 ***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."

This dire climax may speak to us this first day of Advent. We know people facing excruciating circumstances: pay for rent or medicine; in the face of life threatening medical situations trying to find a way through, 65.6 million people forcibly displaced world-wide[[3]](#footnote-3), elected leaders wrestling with passing tax reform and it’s consequences, political and personal conflict, moving from home to the unknown, people grieving, people filled with rage… any good news seems to get swept away … if you like I, recognize or even resemble this chaos in daily life… go All in! look to this Biblical example and **Do not for a moment believe that God is absent.**

These are the exiles, the people suffering exile as a consequence of generations of sin and separation from God… AND GOD IS STILL ACTIVE… not only in a letter of prophesy as we heard last week; no, God is active in dream interpretation, in answering prayer, in guiding and protecting, and eventually in dismantling the oppressive political power of King Nebby’s empire. We have One God, we worship One God, we pray to One God, we bow-down in respect and service and thanksgiving to One God… All In! no exceptions. And God is right here, God with Us, ‘Emmanuel’, right in the middle of the chaos.

Notice that God is All In… and God’s people are All In prayer AND All in action! Prayer is powerful, and miracles do happen… at the same time, it is worth recognizing that along with All In Prayer; and an All-In God… are All In followers of God… living All-in; Drinking the Word All-in; Believing and acting out of that belief… living lives of faith that reflect being All In… witnessing to One God in deed and word.

By the end of this furious rage, and all it’s consequences… the music has changed, the treat of death becomes life… well no, that would be too easy… King Nebby has a new death threat… against anyone of any “nation or any 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." (Dan 3:29)

Rack, Shack, and Benny’s witness, willing to disobey the king and even die rather than to deny or betray their God… our God… led to an empire-wide decree to believe in the Most-High-God… and by then end of the next chapter King Nebby was out of the Throne, out of power, yet still praising the Most-High-God, the King of Heaven… the God we know whose works are truth, and his ways are justice… the God who is All in! with us.

*A note of Good news before it’s swept away… God is still working wonders… 2 of the 4 families that contacted me this fall, about being on the brink of homelessness… have found housing this week through our partners in ministry. Family Promise is still working with the other 2 families anxiously yearning for solutions.*

All-in deeply praying; all in for Advent

* All in with people in pain… mom called crying, her son was in prison and couldn’t get out without an address at which he could live. Couldn’t get an address until he was out… Housing worked-out!
* Case worker called, family sheltered through Safe Berks (formerly Berks Women In Crisis) was pulling life together but ran out of shelter days before everything was in place… many phone calls later, church communities came through… Housing worked-out!
* Divorce, death, surgery… people are in need of help, need advocates… God provides! Sometimes that Help us through God’s work our Hands and voices.
1. Working Preacher Dec 3, 2017; [Juliana Claassens](https://www.workingpreacher.org/profile/default.aspx?uid=2-claassens) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [http://www.bible-history.com/sketches/ancient/nebo-babylonian-god.html Dec 3](http://www.bible-history.com/sketches/ancient/nebo-babylonian-god.html%20Dec%203), 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)