

We are here because he took a stand.

That's the theme for my sermon today. I didn't have all my thoughts together in time for the bulletin printing, so feel free to scribble it in if you want: **we are here because he took a stand.**

If you've been around the Lutheran church for a while that might sound very appropriate for a sermon theme on a day like this. We are celebrating the Reformation of the Christian church, and if you grew up in the Lutheran church, or just you just remember your Renaissance European history, Reformation and taking a stand go hand in hand.

I mean we are St. Paul's *Lutheran* Church and School a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical *Lutheran* Synod. We trace our religious heritage back to Martin Luther – a man who famously took a stand 501 years ago.

Martin Luther, who 501 years ago saw this dissonance between what the Bible said what the church at his time was teaching and doing; who hoped to strike up a dialogue with the religious leaders of this day about this dissonance, but instead of a dialogue, he was hauled before the most powerful and influential religious and secular leaders of Europe and asked if he would take back what he had said and written; who famously took a stand and stuck with what the Bible said despite the very real and present threat that would pose.

Perhaps it would be easy and natural to look at Martin Luther on Reformation and think that we are here because he took a stand. Would the Wisconsin Evangelical *Lutheran* Synod exist without a Martin Luther? Would we be here in this church building teaching and preaching about Jesus with the Bible as our only source without a Martin Luther?

But as great and influential as Martin Luther was, as fitting as it is to remember him and how God used him like that angel in Revelation 14 to proclaim the eternal gospel to generations of people all around the world (the gospel, that word that means the good news of a God who loves us through Jesus); as good as all that is, Martin Luther isn't who I had in mind when I said we are here because *he* took a stand.

Ok, so Marty L's famous stand isn't why we are here. Perhaps we are here because Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego took a stand. That famous account from Daniel 3 is, after all, the Bible verses I'm using as the basis for this sermon today.

Talk about courage, faith, and commitment under fire! Every bit as harrowing of a stand as Martin Luther's, it is easy to see why this story has captured the imaginations of kids and grownups for generations.

These three guys take a stand before a king! All they would have had to do was keep their fingers crossed behind their backs and bow down to the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had made. The king would never know if they had actually worshiped that statue, and God could always forgive them for it later. But they took an incredible stand.

Maybe we are here because they took a stand. They took a stand, and miraculously lived to tell about it along with their contemporary Daniel (who made his own stand and miraculously lived write it all down in the book of Daniel). Maybe that is why we are here – because they took a stand and proved to King Nebuchadnezzar, the people of their day, and us that our God is the Most High God. Where would God's church be without courageous folks like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? What more fitting reason do we need to be here today than to remember and learn from the courageous faith of people like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

But as courageous and inspiring as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's stand was, as fitting as it is to remember their faith and dedication – they are not who I had in mind when I said we are here because *he* took a stand.

So, we're not here because of Marty L's stand. We're not here because of Shad, Mesh, and Abe's stand. Perhaps you've caught on to my little game this morning.

Who is the "he"? Who is the one who took a stand worth celebrating? Who is the reason we are here today?

You know it.

Martin Luther sure knew it.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego sure knew it.

The LORD, God Most High, Jesus.

We are here because Jesus took a stand.

As amazing as Martin Luther was, the eternal Gospel would have continued to be proclaimed with or without Martin Luther. God would have reformed his church with or without Martin Luther.

The Reformation happened because Jesus took a stand, because Jesus refused to sit back and watch his eternal Gospel smothered by the suffocating corruption and legalism of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Reformation happened because Jesus took a stand 501 years ago, at the onset of the Reformation, when he took a monk (a far from perfect monk) and gifted him, blessed him, protected him, and used him so that the eternal gospel could be preached to all nations.

This is the reason why Luther himself didn't want people to be called *Lutheran* – Luther took his stand, but it was Jesus who made the Reformation happen.

Luther knew it and you better believe that those three men walking around in that furnace with **one who looked like a son of the gods** knew that they were there because Jesus took a stand.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego lived to tell the tale because Jesus took a stand and chose to prove to King Nebuchadnezzar, to prove to these three men, to prove to the world that there is only one God – and he, not earthly kings, calls the shots.

We are here because Jesus took a stand... and that is really good news.

Do you want to know why I think that's really good news?

Because Reformation makes me feel guilty. Have any of you ever felt that way before? You should.

On Reformation we celebrate and thank God for some incredible people who did some amazing things for God – we talk about these huge, obvious, impressive acts of faith – men like Martin Luther, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who stood up to kings and risked martyrdom for their Jesus.

I can't help but look at these incredible examples of faith and feel guilty – because that's not me.

I mean, I like to think that I have the faith of a martyr – like if things got really bad quickly in America and I got hauled in front of a judge and told to stop preaching everything in the Bible “or else”, I like to think that I would have the faith to make my stand. But the reality is I might not ever have to make that kind of a stand.

But you don't have to be hauled in front of a king or judge to take a stand for Jesus. Every single day I am faced with hundreds of opportunities to take my own stands for Jesus.

Opportunities to take a stand in front of other people – like Martin, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Like when I hear some of that office gossip going on, when Fred is frustrated with Karen because he would do things so differently than her and he just wants to let out some of that frustration by trashing her behind her back – that is a chance to take a stand. Who cares if the conversation gets awkward or they think I'm being judgmental, God says it is my obligation to defend and protect the reputation of the people around me – that is a chance to take a stand.

Like when Susan, a sophomore at Madison feels pressured by her friends to drink under age, pressured by her boyfriend to ignore what God says about sex and marriage – that is a chance to take a stand.

And these opportunities to take a stand don't just happen when we interact with other people, my own selfish heart provides me with hundreds of opportunities to take a stand. Every single time my heart wants me to do the selfish thing is my opportunity to take a stand – think and speak and act not selfishly, but for Jesus.

And that is why Reformation makes me feel guilty.

Because Martin took his stand.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego took their stand.

But me... I crumble like a house of cards on a daily basis.

Jesus in our Mark today says, “Everyone who stands firm to the end will be saved.” And I... feel guilty.

And that is why it is really good that Jesus took a stand.

It was good for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when Jesus took a stand 2600 years ago, when he (or one of his angels) took a stroll with three men in the midst of a blazing furnace. It was good, they got to live.

It was good for Martin Luther when Jesus took a stand 501 years ago, when he used a monk in Germany to make sure his eternal gospel would continue to be preached. That was good, more people get to hear about Jesus now.

But best of all by far, it is good that for us that 2000 years ago Jesus took the ultimate stand for Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Martin, me and you.

He stood in the Garden of Gethsemane when his betrayer came with a mob.

He stood in the kangaroo court of the high priest slandered and mocked.

He stood in the palace of Pilate ridiculed and whipped.

He stood with nails through his hands and feet as the only support as he gasped for air on the cross.

He stood with our sins on his shoulders.

He stood before his pissed off Father in heaven and took the wrath of God because of sin. My sin. Your sin.

And that friends is why we are here. We are here because we have a Jesus who will not just sit by and watch us be destroyed by sin. We are here because Jesus took a stand.

We are here because Jesus stands against kings who would take his glory.

We are here because Jesus stands against religious authorities who threaten to smother his gospel.

We are here because Jesus stands as the crucified and risen Savior for a world full of people who daily fail to stand firm.

We are here because Jesus stood up to save.

That is the eternal Gospel.

That is why we celebrate instead of wallowing in guilt this Reformation.

We are here to praise our Jesus who took a stand for us.

Amen.