

Such a Time as This

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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“People of Faith – God’s Word” The Book of Esther

*Which of our identities ultimately shape our lives? Am I first and foremost a parent? An American? A Christian? An employee? What kind of risks are we willing to take on behalf of those vulnerable and threatened? (Questions from Working Preacher Amy Oden, 2014 Commentary)*

Esther 4:9-17

Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, “All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law — all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days.” When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.” Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

God’s grace and love be with you today. Amen.

The most famous line from the book of Esther....Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.

Esther is a fascinating, fun book in the Bible. Esther reads like a melodrama and is the only book in the Bible which never mentions God’s name. More about that later! There is a brief outline of the ten short chapters in your bulletin. Likewise, here’s a quick context and summary of the story.

Jerusalem has been conquered. The Jews, God’s chosen people, were taken in chains into captivity in Babylon. Persians now rule and although they allowed some Jews to return to Jerusalem, other Jews dispersed. They married and settled into cities in Persia, the setting of Esther’s story. King Ahaseurus (historically this is King Xerxes) is married to Queen Vashti. After a 187-day party full of drinking

and showing off his power, the king demands Queen Vashti to appear, so he can show off her beauty. She refuses.

The search for a new queen ensues and all the available virgins in the area, are taken into the King's harem. Esther is a Jewish girl, and an orphan. She is a nobody. Her cousin, Mordecai, has raised Esther like his own daughter. Seeing this opportunity for Esther, Mordecai sends her into the harem of the King. But he tells her not to reveal her Jewish identity. Esther is loved by all, especially the king and she becomes the new queen.

King Ahaseurus has a right-hand man, named Haman. Haman commands all the people to bow down to him. Mordecai the Jew, refuses, and Haman's anger burns strong. He gets the king to decree not only the killing of Mordecai, but the destruction of all the Jews – they are to be annihilated!

Mordecai gets a message to Queen Esther and tells her, "Now is your time! You must go to the King. You must save the Jews." This is where our sermon begins.

As an orphan, Esther was without family. Cousin Mordecai raises her as his own. Yet that is short lived as she is suddenly thrust into the king's harem. As queen she is now at the center of a political and sexual world. Esther makes no power plays as a woman or Queen. She doesn't vie to produce an heir. She doesn't weigh in on political matters. Instead, she shows up each day, working to keep her true identity secret. Yet being a Jew is another mark against her as the Persians only tolerate the Jews living amongst them. What is she to do?

There are people living amongst us who are "Esthers." Asians. Hispanics. Blacks. Illegal or legal immigrants, living in a land not their own. Yet they are here in Loveland. They know they are not fully embraced as a people in this predominately Caucasian city. Students get bullied at schools. Intolerant people say racial slurs to them in stores. Some people won't look at them or engage them in conversation. They don't have any power plays to make. They show up each day, with heads down and mouths shut. These are the Esthers amongst us.

Esther's identity, her faith, her power, her royalty and womanhood, all come into play when the decree goes out to kill her people, the Jews. What is she to do? She resists Mordecai's request. "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law — all alike are to be put to death. Only if

the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come into the king for thirty days,” she says.

Esther must decide who she really is. Which of her identities will prevail? Is she a cousin? A woman? A Persian queen? A Jew worshipping her God? Or a woman who allows her future to be decided by those in power.

Yet Mordecai prevails upon her by saying, “Your possible execution mirrors the execution of our whole people! Your personal story is intersecting with all the Jews at this very moment.”

He says, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this."

Perhaps? Absolutely! As I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, no where in the book of Esther is God’s name written. Yet God is absolutely one of the characters on stage and working behind the scenes. God put Esther in a place of power. Mordecai discovers an assignation plan against the King and that will be Mordecai’s rise to power. At the moment Haman is going to ask the king to hang Mordecai, Haman is asked to bestow royal honors upon Mordecai and lead him through the streets. God is at work.

What will Esther decide? I think the question is pertinent to all of us. Our choices at times depend upon which identity we’re focused on. When aging parents need our assistance, we act out of our identity as sons and daughters. When work projects are important, perhaps the family gets less time until the deadline has passed. Identities and our choices aren’t static, they are fluid.

But for you and me, what do you think is our primary identity? Esther had to decide if she’s a cousin. A woman? A Persian queen? A Jew worshipping her God?

What is your primary identity? Spouse? American? Christian? Child of God? An employee or retiree? Where do we put our true allegiance? Where do we make decisions from?

I think the answer is important because the question that follows is, if one is our primary identity, what other decisions necessarily follow?

For example: Christian parents who want to model 'love of neighbor' for their children, give to Christian organizations who care for children in third world countries. The child to be sponsored is chosen. Letters are exchanged. Photos are posted on the kitchen refrigerator. These parents have made a conscious decision that it is one way to bring God's Kingdom on earth.

On the other hand, we think of modern leaders, like King Ahasuerus, whose allegiance and primary identity is to self and power. Those leaders have chosen to annihilate whole countries down to the rubble and peoples the same.

On another hand, people who work with refugees and immigrants, or stand up for basic human rights, take certain risks. One can be arrested. Put on a no-fly list. Fined. Military members work for the good of a country and realize that the front line is dangerous.

Esther found herself in just that situation. In the end, she chose God and faith over her personal safety, her own identity, and her royal life as Queen. She tells Mordecai "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

In the fasting, there is prayer....God heard those prayers. The king did not kill Esther but held out his royal scepter to her. She invited only the king and Haman to two separate banquets which she would host. At the second, Esther reveals her identity and pleads for the lives of all the Jewish people in Persia. Haman is denounced as a wicked enemy and hanged on a gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Villains, heroes, and a Queen for a heroine; Esther has it all. Let's reflect this week upon what primary identity we might be acting out of. Secondly, let's ask the question of God, is this who you need me to be for just such a time as this. Amen!