

The Story of Esther

Church, I invite us this morning to reflect on the gist of Esther's story as if we were watching a PG 13 movie. Esther's story is a narrative of political conspiracy, of the triumph of good over evil, and of a reversal of fortunes. It reminds us that God is always at work in the world especially in times when we might ask, "Where are you, God"?

The story begins with young Esther becoming queen. The king did not realize that she was Jewish. Esther did not reveal her kindred. God placed Esther in the right place at the right time to accomplish God's purposes. Esther would liberate her people just as Joseph saved his family from hunger and starvation. She would rescue the Jewish people from being annihilated just as Moses led the people of Israel from slavery to the promised land.

As queen, Esther would have the king's attention and would be kept informed of what was happening in the Persian Empire. Esther's uncle, Mordecai, was in the right place at the right time. He overheard the king's guards plotting to assassinate the king. Mordecai told Esther who also informed the king at the right time. The king investigated and the guards who were implicated in the plot were killed. Mordecai won the king's favour.

Next, we meet Haman who developed a dislike for Mordecai. He wanted to see Mordecai killed. Haman also started plotting against the Jewish people. He devised a plan to have all the Jewish people throughout the empire killed but his plot required the king's approval. Haman tricked the king to get his consent. The Jewish people learned about Haman's plot and wondered if there was anything they could do to escape the impending massachar. They desperately mourned, and wept.

Esther emerged as a saviour during this crisis when the people of Israel desperately needed God's intervention. Even though she was aware of the risks and dangers involved, she was determined to save her people from annihilation. In wisdom and as a first step, she called for a three day fast and prayers for the people of Israel.

Esther wrestled but later she would understand the urgency to draw the king's attention to Haman's evil plot. She organised several banquets hoping for an opportunity to expose Haman's plot to the king. When Esther got the king's attention, he was willing to grant Esther half of the kingdom. This was Esther's opportunity to reveal Haman's plot against the people of Israel. She told the king, "For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated." The king was shocked! "Who is he and where is he who has presumed to do this?" Esther replied, "A foe and an enemy, this wicked Haman." Haman was guilty; no questions were to be asked. He was killed and the Jews were saved.

God has brought us here for a reason. How might God use us in this time and place? There are times when our faith requires that we take risks. We might risk

friendships when compelled to confront some issue. We might be isolated by others when we differentiate issues from individuals or when we take unpopular stances. We may risk being labelled when we self differentiate ourselves for particular causes.

When we examine our lives, might the risks we have taken or failed to take be the reason our lives have turned out this way? Esther risked everything to save her people. She was the right person at the right time and in the right place. God has a way of taking our experiences and using them in ways we could never imagine. God qualifies us. We have been called to follow Jesus. This call is a risk. How might you let God use your life's experiences to accomplish God's purpose. You and I are here for a reason. We have a purpose!

This is the story line of Esther's experience: Perhaps – Just perhaps you have come to this place, to this moment in your life, to this family, to this challenge, to this brother or sister. to this congregation, to this situation for just such a time as this!"

Divine moments happen in our lives all the time but we have to listen if we are to embrace them. How well do you listen? Will you listen again and again, that you might hear what the spirit of God might be saying to you? Will you do what Esther did? Will you realize the reality of the human situation, seek all the help that you need, pray and fast, place yourself in God's hands? Has God placed you here for such a time as this?

Church, listening is important. Esther listened. Esther saved the Jewish people because her spirit was stirred to courage. In addition to courage, Esther needed charisma, a plan, and good fortune to help her people. And then, as God would have it, King Ahasuerus issued a new decree that enabled the Jewish people to see yet another day!

What does Esther do at this decisive moment? She stops disagreeing with her uncle, Mordecai. She stops disregarding the issues; she stops making lame excuses; she stops running away from the problems; she understands that it was time for her to gather herself and to centre her being in the spiritual practices of her people. She calls on the entire community to come alongside her in prayer and fasting, thus exercising leadership. She resolves to face up to her responsibilities to her brothers and sisters. We see her going to the King sceptre or no sceptre. Knowing in the depth of her being that what she must do includes self disclosure as a Jewish woman. Church, I saw her taking stock of the realities of her situation. I heard Esther say; Kama Mbaya, mbaya! - a Swahili expression meaning what come may, if I perish I perish. She goes to the hub of the empire that she might save the Jewish people.

The story teaches us multiple lessons. We see that God has a way of using us to God's own glory. God is able to take all of our life's experiences and use them for a purpose. God is able to put the right people in the right place at the right time. That is what happened to Esther.

We learn that life under capricious power is dangerous for everybody but especially for people on the margins of society. We see that God had given all

of us measured power and that power is not simply confined to one individual. Esther who though queen is still vulnerable. Esther is Jewish and yet she can marry the most powerful man in the Persian Empire. At the same time, she is in the dark in that she has no idea that there are plans to execute her together with all the Jewish people. However, she manages to wrap the king around her little finger by her insight into human nature, a sense of timing, and beauty. Through it all, Esther was aware of both her power and limitations that came with her race and gender. She knew herself so well that she was very much aware of the resources she had as well as her limitations/challenges. She had education, training, an uncle, a powerful husband. Yet, Esther did not have power over her own life. She was married but without an understanding relationship with her husband; she was not safe in the midst of people with power who had planned to kill her and her people.

What do you have, beloved of God? – life, beauty, education, strength, financial security, good health, friends and family? What is lacking in your life? – freedom, peace, love, joy, peace, patience, self control? Like Esther, we all have some things and we all lack some things but the good news is that Esther did not allow what she did not have to get in the way of doing what needed to be done. Amen? Esther used what she had for the common good.

Reflect now with me about the time and context in which we live today. Do you have power in your home, in your church, in your school, in your community, in your city, in your state and in the greater world? If so, how would you exercise such power?

Watch now with me, church, and listen as Mordecai taps you on the shoulder saying; Ajua, perhaps you have been given this family, this community, this vocation, these resources and skills, this knowledge, wisdom and understanding for such a time as to do what no one else could do!

Esther's life was not easy. She had some gifts and graces and so do you. She invested time and energy training, so have you, yet without ever knowing that God was preparing her to carry out an enormous task that would save the Jewish people. May be God has been preparing you for some task. May be you feel like Esther at a crucial moment when she recognised that the rest of her life had to be offered for a cause that was above her own safety, privilege and status.

Church, it must have been a conversion experience! It did not matter that Mordecai who had brought Esther face to face with her destiny was not a saint but a stubborn, scheming and proud uncle who had placed the Jewish people's life in jeopardy.

Can you recognise the Mordecai in your life? Do you hear him speaking to you? What is he saying to you? Are you ready to rise?

Mordecai was without character. He was not a role model but he spoke the truth to Esther. I heard him say: Esther, Look back that you might see how the story of your life has unfolded. See the events that have shaped your life. Some seemed at the time like setbacks but are now part of who you are. Become aware of the importance of the Jewish woman being in the empire at such a time as

this. See the unique opportunity you have to save the entire Jewish people. Look at the challenges we have, church: poverty, disease, war, civil strife. Remember all the people who have made a difference in this country. Give about three examples, including a woman or two. They listened. They caught a glimpse of what the United States of America could become. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, could have walked away. He could have looked the other way. He could have said no to constantly being beaten and put in jail. But he listened. Our very own brother, Angus MacDonald, who you were all privileged to know, paid attention. Without people like them and people like us we would not be where we are today. Perhaps there is someone like Mordecai today, perhaps he or she is getting hold of your ear and opening your eyes to some need. May be you have been given a talent that could be used in church and society. May be you have a vision that could help grow this church, maybe you have resources that could make a difference in a poor family's life – for just such a time as this!

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