

“Good to Grow - Making a Difference”

Such a Time as This

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The Book of Esther

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From the message to Queen Esther:

“Don’t think that just because you live in the King’s palace that you’ll get out of this alive. If you persist in staying silent, you and your family will be wiped out. Who knows? Maybe you were made queen for just such a time as this.”

The story of Esther is wonderful. It takes place after the Jewish Exile. You may remember that around 600 BC the nation of Israel was conquered, and the brightest and best were taken into captivity in Babylon. By this time, many years have passed. With the rise of the Persian Empire, many Jews had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, but many were still scattered around the Persian Empire. This time is known as the Diaspora, and it is the setting for our story.

Esther is a Jewish girl with a hidden identity, an orphan raised by a wise uncle named Mordecai. She became queen by winning a ‘Miss Persia beauty contest’, with the only judge being King Xerxes. So Esther lands in the lap of luxury.

Now every good story has a villain. In this case it’s a man by the name of Haman. As the trusted right-hand man of a weak, short-tempered and self-serving king, Haman has a lot of power. A series of events that embarrassed Haman makes him hatch a plan to exterminate all the Jews in the empire, using an edict from the weak king. This is where Esther comes in. She alone is in a position where she might be able to save her people and change the course of history.

In some ways Esther is special and powerful. She is clearly beautiful, and she is the Queen of all Persia. She has access to wealth and to her husband the King. We expect that those who *have* more, can and will *do* more. As the Bible puts it:

“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” (Luke 12:48)

Esther has a lot of ‘much’ in her life. However, seen another way, she is very vulnerable and powerless.

Simply being a woman made her vulnerable and powerless. Women were utterly dependent on men to protect and provide. There is a reason that over and over again throughout the scriptures there are commands to **care for ‘the widow and the orphan’**. These, along with the poor and the foreigners, were the weakest in society, and God continually calls his people to care for the weak and the oppressed.

But Esther has one more strike against her — a hidden identity. She is a member of a persecuted minority — a Jew. Her wise uncle Mordecai tells her to keep that fact hidden. Given how the rest of the story plays out, there was clearly good reason not to tell the world that she was a Jew.

She might have been the Queen of Persia — but that doesn’t mean a whole lot when you consider that on a whim the king had summarily dismissed and replaced his last queen, Vashti, who was sent away because she refused to come and be shown off at one of the king’s big drunken parties. She stood up for herself and said ‘No!’ to the king. So there are two strong women in this story: Vashti, who took a stand and suffered the consequences, and Esther, who took a stand, confronted Haman in the presence of the king, and saved an entire people.

I couldn’t help but feel the appropriateness of this text as I saw clips of Dr. Blasey Ford testifying before the U.S. Senate on Thursday. It’s interesting how much and how little has changed in 2500 years! Speaking truth to power has never been easy. It always takes great courage.

When her uncle Mordecai comes to Queen Esther and tells her of the plot to exterminate her people throughout the Empire, begging her to do something — she is hesitant and terrified. The only way she is able to make a difference and save her people is by looking beyond her own needs and concerns and fears to the needs of others.

It takes huge maturity to see beyond our own needs and fears. When you were a baby, everything was all about you and your needs — that’s nature’s way. Babies only know their own hunger, their own need to be held securely and to be changed out of that wet sloppy stink down below. They don’t care what time of the day or night it is, or how much sleep mom or dad got last night — they only care about their needs.

But part of growing includes seeing beyond ourselves. As we grow, we begin to see the needs of others: first the needs of our family, and then the needs of our friends and people we know. That circle of care, if we grow and mature in a healthy way, continues to expand so that we care about people we’ve never met or don’t even know by name.

Last week we talked about our relationships and how we are called as a church; as followers of Jesus to live in community with one another even when that is not so easy. We are all a part of one another. As human beings we are connected, and the highest calling is to make a difference to our fellow human beings — even when it doesn't directly affect us.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu speaks about this:



“One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu — the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu

– you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.”

Philippians 2 3-8 says this:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

Seeing the needs of the other and sacrificing our own will and desires for that greater good goes to the heart of the Christian message — the incredible love that Jesus showed in dying on a cross to set us free.

Today is Orange Shirt Day. It is a day when we remember the dark past of Residential Schools and the ongoing effect of this tragedy.



The Orange Shirt Day campaign began in Williams Lake, B.C. in 2013, and was inspired by the story of Phyllis Webstad, who was sent to a residential school in 1973 when she was six years old. On her first day, school officials took away an orange shirt that her grandmother had just bought for

her. Take a look at this video: <https://youtu.be/E3vUqr01kAk>

“I didn’t understand why they wouldn’t give it back to me, it was mine!” Webstad wrote in a post on the Orange Shirt Day campaign’s website. “The colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn’t matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing.”

I find the topic of Reconciliation a challenging one because there is no easy fix. For 200 years the government tried to get rid of “the Indian Problem”. Their solution was to wipe out Indian culture through assimilation to the point where you would barely notice or see the Indian.

The plan was not as overtly obvious and heinous as Haman’s plan to have a day of extermination of the Jewish people, but the plan was still to get to the point over a generation or two where there wouldn’t be an Indigenous population to speak of. Some of the running and workings of the Residential School system was ‘well intentioned’ ... and some of it was pure evil towards innocent children. The legacy of trauma and abuse reverberates generations later, and there is no easy fix. Nevertheless, we are called to take steps towards reconciliation. We are called to take steps towards listening and healing and making changes that will plant seeds of goodness for the future.

They say the best day of your life is the day you were born and the 2nd best day is the day when you understand *why* you were born.

When Esther protests the mission she has been given, Mordecai gives the best line in the whole book: “*And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?*” (Esther 4:14)

You were born for a reason and for a purpose. I don’t care whether your parents planned your arrival or not: **God did**. God loves you. You are one-of-a-kind, and there are things that you can accomplish or people that you can influence that no one else can. It always involves sacrifice. It is easier to simply care about your own issues.

Our lives can be so heavy and so hard on their own, and the temptation is great to revert to that infant survival mode we started life with and just focus inward. Churches do that too — especially when things are hard, and money is tight: they go into survival mode, and focus energies inward.

Folks, it’s ok and even good to do some self-care. Living entirely for others and not caring for yourself is not what we are called to, so there are times in our lives when we just have no choice but to focus inward. Being diagnosed and walking that cancer journey is a good example.

But if your whole life is focused on your own needs and jumping from one personal crisis to another, then that's not good. There will always be troubles in your life, and if you wait for your life to be nice and stable and sorted before you care about others or make a difference, you will never get there. If you say to yourself "*I will give more and do more when I have more*" — time, energy, money, friends, you name it — you will never get there. You are not called to do everything, but you are called to do something.

Do not think you don't have enough — that you are too small to help and to make a difference. It is true that we are small and weak and vulnerable on our own, but in God's hands we are strong. In God's hands, the small makes a world of difference. Look at the mustard seed. Look at a tiny baby born in a stable. Look at twelve ordinary, uneducated dudes who decided to put their lives in Christ's hands.

You may be small ... but never doubt your significance. Never doubt your influence. You are a child of God. And if you ask, you can be filled with God's light, which will give you the strength to face your greatest fear, and will shine through you and make a difference to the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.