

**For Such a Time as This**  
by Rev. Sharon Lee MacArthur  
For Berkeley Chinese Community Church  
September 30, 2018 • 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost • 11 am

**Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22**

<sup>1</sup>So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. <sup>2</sup>On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, 'What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.' <sup>3</sup>Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. <sup>4</sup>For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.' <sup>5</sup>Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, 'Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?' <sup>6</sup>Esther said, 'A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!' Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

<sup>9</sup>Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, 'Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high.' And the king said, 'Hang him on that.' <sup>10</sup>So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

<sup>20</sup> Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, <sup>21</sup>enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, <sup>22</sup>**as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness,** days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

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My granddaughter Ikaika is 16 already. She has rounded another corner – into semi-adulthood. The other day, I had to say no when she asked if I would be able to pick her up after work and drive her home one day. I explained I had a meeting scheduled at that particular time. "That's Ok, popo she said, I can uber home!"

"Oh, my", I thought, "she is growing up so fast."



Suddenly in my mind's eye she was 4 years old again rounding an earlier corner - she had just been transformed from an "all-too-shy never finding a friend to play with" kid to a "I wanna be a super hero" little person - fighting the bad guys and helping the good guys!

You know, sometimes we adults dream of being the person to change the world by risking honor, status, security, and maybe even life itself, through bold action. These would-be heroes long for the opportunity to be put to the test, to stand up for justice no matter what it costs, to make their lives count in a dramatic, decisive way.

While the being a hero dream might fade as we become older and wiser, most of us hope that if we were really tested in some deep and difficult way, we would do the right thing. Most of us would prefer to go about our business in the world in our own rather quiet way, trying to get along and doing what is good and right among our family, friends and community...right?



And that's why I like Esther - she was not someone who set out to get a book of the Bible named after her - she was a pleasant, pretty, respectful and obedient sort of person who was used to taking orders....AND the center of an amazing story.

William Willimon frames the story of Esther this way:

Once upon a time there was a king who ruled over the world from India to Ethiopia, his name was Ahasuerus. He decided he needed a queen, so he ordered that the most lovely women from his 127 provinces be brought before him - he would choose the loveliest as his queen. The winner of this beauty contest was Esther.

The king didn't know much about her except that she was beautiful -  
- he didn't know that Esther was an orphan,  
- he didn't know that she was a Jew in the care of her uncle, Mordecai.

Mordecai advised Esther to marry the king, even though he was not of her faith or her people. Besides, Esther was a poor nobody, a woman, and Ahasuerus was a king and in the socio-economic-gender based-class dependent politics of the day, what could she do?



In the king's court was a wicked guy named Haman...he wasn't only a bureaucrat — he was a **bad** bureaucrat - one with an agenda - and it wasn't a good agenda. Haman plotted to kill all the Jews in all the king's lands...he saw these foreigners as troublesome aliens who would never be loyal subjects.

Haman set a date for the mass executions. And he goes to the king and says, "Dear King, it has come to our attention that there is a certain ethnic group in your kingdom who consider themselves above your laws. Multiculturalism and ethnic diversity is an otherwise good thing...but a rule is a rule. Allow me to help my king by obliterating them."

Well, that sounded good to the king - a rule is a rule. So, Ahasuerus ordered that on the thirteenth of the month of Adar all Jews would be slain.

The Jews were pretty upset by the news. Mordecai sent news of the plan to Esther up in the palace, begging her to help. "Who knows?" asked Mordecai, "maybe you have been put in the palace for a such a time as this."

So we have to remember palace etiquette in those days.... it was hard to get to see the king....even if you were a corporate kind of guy with a generous donation to make towards the king's treasury, you couldn't get in. Even the queen had to ask permission. If she showed up unsummoned by the king, even the queen could be killed.



Esther reminds Mordecai of the rules of palace etiquette.

"Bother the king when he doesn't want to be bothered, and I'll be a dead queen! or at least a banished one - remember what happened to Queen Vashti my predecessor? She didn't come when the king called her and she was banished!" But Mordecai reminds Esther that she is the only hope her people have.

Esther doesn't know what to do. For three days - she can't sleep. Finally, she decides that she would do it – go talk the king and figures "If I die, I die." She was terrified when she entered the throne room...and lo and behold, the king asked her to speak.



“Dear King,” she said, “would you grant to me just one little favor?” She must have caught him in a great mood – because he said, “Just name it - even half my kingdom, whatever.”

“Would you and your trusted advisor Haman due me the honor of attending a great dinner with me?” she asked?

Well - when Haman heard about the invitation, he was even more full of himself, so proud that he was being invited up to the big house for a great party.



Passing old Mordecai on the way to dinner, he told him to get ready to swing from a rope by morning. Esther spent the whole next day wondering how in the world she was going to talk to the king about Haman’s plot against the Jews. The banquet was a great affair, but Esther couldn’t bring herself to speak to the king about her people.

At the end of the evening, Esther said that the food and the wine had been so great, and the dinner table conversation so wonderful, that she was going to give another dinner tomorrow. Would the king and his advisor be good enough to come?

They agreed. Next night, maybe it was the wine, or maybe it was the Boeuf Bourguignon, but King Ahasuerus blurted out, “Esther, you are such a great queen...tell me what would make you happy.”



Esther knew this was the moment...and found the courage to say, “Dear King, there is an evil man in this palace who wants to kill me and those whom I love. Let me and my people live; that’s all I ask.”

“What?” asked the king. “Tell me who this scoundrel is.” “He’s over there,” she said, “Haman – the one finishing his dessert.”

Haman was shocked! He didn’t even know Esther was Jewish! He was even more shocked when the king ordered him taken out and hanged on the very gallows Haman had been preparing for old Mordecai.

And that's how the people of Israel were saved. A savvy woman - a courageous woman - who recognized and seized the moment - God's moment! A woman who laid aside her own safety - who spoke up in behalf of her people and saved them in a foreign land. Esther was indeed placed in the palace for such a time as this – like her uncle said.



And that's the story of Esther...the book Esther has never been one of the top ten books of the Bible. For one thing, Esther is a woman, and most of history has been most interested in recording the actions of men. For another thing, some Christians have been a little perplexed by Esther's morality, becoming the mistress, then the queen of a pagan.

And another thing, God is never mentioned in the entire Book of Esther. God doesn't speak or intervene – nothing! So why should I tell you this story, and on a Sunday, and in church on the Sunday before World Communion Sunday 2018?

Well - the story is about a woman who is living in and with a culture that is not her own...a reminder that there are many cultures in the world in many places in the world today where Christians are breaking bread and pouring the cup to remember and affirm Christ as the Head of the Church.

And another why - I think that anyone hearing the story of Esther can recognize "God" and "God's presence" and especially "God's timing". What are the odds of an orphaned Jew becoming a beloved Queen just in time to save her people! That's God speaking then...and an inspiration for us to look for and recognize God speaking now....

Where are the strange coincidences in your life? What might be in God's datebook that haven't quite been recognized by our human eyes yet?

What difference can we make? Where are our passions? What buttons are pushed when we are out and about? Could these buttons possibly be God nudging us to do something about it?



The Juliets lunched together on Thursday at HK Home Kitchen and were able to keep up with the Senate hearings on the TV Screen above our table. Those who had been watching the hearings all morning summarized what had happened so far. The sentiments around the table

were supportive of Dr. Ford and her statements...and accusations. The sense I get from many of my friends and colleagues is that this is one of those baby steps to becoming a superhero. So many around the table voiced indignation that this woman's story seemed to be discounted by so many and deemed irrelevant to the political career of a man who is nominated to sit on the highest court of the country.



The thing that moves me is that these same Juliets will be collecting things for Thanksgiving gift bags to present to women who seek shelter and a sense of “home” at the Women’s Day time Drop In Center that is down the street from us. It’s one small way of saying, “you are important” and “your stories count” to a group of women who are currently homeless and whose life history is **not** made public on TV news. So watch for an invitation for you to help by donating certain items on the Center’s wish list...you can also take a baby step toward being a super hero for someone!

The thing is – there are lots of things that happen in our community and the world that might be competing for our attention, resources and energy. What to help? How to help? God is still speaking and each of us might hear different things or hear the same things and respond in differing ways. And it’s ok to just do small things...

I think today’s story is **about** small things and small steps being ok to take in this big world of challenges.



Esther was a hero, but a reluctant one. Eventually she did a great deed for her people, but she took small, even hesitant steps on the way there. She assimilated herself into the dominate culture, so much so that most of her people probably thought that she had given away the store...her people might have thought that she had allowed herself to be so co-opted by the pagan culture that she was no longer a Jew.

As a woman in that culture and in those times, she was powerless, even though she was queen. Yet Esther used what power she had, maneuvered skillfully within the limits imposed upon her by the culture, and did a great thing.

What she did was not particularly spectacular but that's good because most of us are not very spectacular ourselves and might be able to identify with her. Fortunately, most of the good that God needs doing is not too spectacular.

On one of the pages of the UCC website – the heading is eye-catching:



### How can one person change the world?

And under it is a list of suggestions –

-Sponsor a child . . . Plant a tree . . . Rebuild a home . . . Visit a prisoner . . . Be a mentor . . .  
Teach . . . Serve a meal . . . Bring water to the desert . . . Pray . . . Donate . . .

What part of our world is waiting for you to make a difference?

Did you notice they are all small things....

And in our daily lives in our corner of the world -

It might be about breaking the chain of inconsiderate drivers by being considerate.

It might be a kind word to a harried grocery clerk.

It might be a letter of encouragement to a congressperson who shares our views or a letter articulating an alternative view.

It might be to put in a word to the boss in behalf of someone who can't speak for himself or herself.



So, Esther's story is for us. In little, ordinary, unspectacular ways, the Kingdom of God - God's Beloved Community, is being squished OR advanced through **us** on the basis of our little words, gestures, and acts as individuals and as BCCC – God's church.

It's about the little "pleases" and "thank you's" of daily life - it's about being gracious and speaking up for those who can't speak up for themselves and finding the "God-given" moment with the "God-given" courage to do so.

Esther is a story about that - may we rejoice in sharing in the voice of a still-speaking God for such a time as this. Amen.