

Queen Esther Is A Drama Queen
Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22
Colebrook Congregational Church
18th Sunday After Pentecost / Ordinary 26 / September 27, 2015

Growing up, my parents would send me to Silver Lake Conference Center in Sharon, CT for half the summer. One of the theme weeks that was my favorite was called the Sing Praise Conferences. What happened there was we all arrive for camp on a Sunday and pick a story from the Bible. Then, starting Monday morning we would start writing an original musical based on that Bible story to perform on Friday evening. One of those weeks, we focused on the Book of Esther.

The Book of Esther is not like most of the other books of the Bible, it is one of the two books that does not explicitly mention God at all. It was also one of later books to be made canon in the Bible. It did not even appear in most Christian Bibles until the fourth century. In the Old Testament, it falls under the category of “Writings,” along with the books of poems, poetry, and wisdom; ones having been divinely inspired, and so ranks just below the prophecies in terms of authority.

The Book of Esther takes place in Persia, after the Exile had ended, where many of the Jews dispersed by Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah had returned to Jerusalem. But some stayed. Some traveled back and forth. It is also tied to Purim, the Festival of Lots, explaining why the festival is celebrated. The story takes place after the Greco-Persian Wars, the Battles of Marathon, Thermopylae, & Salamis, but before the conquests of Alexander the Great.

The Book begins with King Ahasuerus holding a banquet, and he summoned Queen Vashti. She refused to obey, and the King removed her. He arranged to replace her through a search for a beautiful young woman. Esther caught the eye of one of the searchers.

Esther was orphaned and was sent from Jerusalem to be fostered by her uncle Mordecai in Susa, the ancient capital of the Persian Empire. She is then chosen by the king to be the new queen. Meanwhile, Mordecai hangs out near the palace in case Esther needs him, and he soon angers the new prime

minister, Haman, because Jewish Law forbided Mordecai from bowing to him. Haman decides to take revenge on all Jews living in Persia, and tricks the king in to ordering their extermination.

Mordecai learns of this and informs Queen Esther. They argued over what to do, and in the end, they decided that Queen Esther must go to the King. She first orders all the Jews in the Empire to join her in a three-day fast. On the third day, she prepared herself, and presented herself to the king. Now, it was illegal for her do this. She could not approach the king when she was not summoned to appear before him. But he allowed it, sparing her life, and she invited him to a banquet she was hosting. He appeared, she charmed him, and then asked him to come back the following day. This is where this week's selection picks up.

She presents herself to her husband and king, prepared for death. She is reporting in as a Jew, and there was a decree to exterminate all of them going in to effect soon. Neither the king, nor Haman, knew she was Jewish, so they were shocked. She pleads for her life and that of her people's lives. The king acquiesced, and allowed them to live.

Esther was rather passive through much of the Book that bears her name, with Mordecai being the main operator at first. It was not until Haman's plot became known did she start to stand out. And most her part of the story is rather dramatic. Everything she did risked her death and the death of her people. She made a dramatic entry into the throne room, then the dramatic reveal, where her claiming of the identity as a Jew meant she was to be put to death with the rest of them. She could have kept quiet and been safe, but she didn't. She spoke up and laid everything on the line in a bold display before her husband and king.

There is good drama and bad drama. I dislike reality tv with its bad or contrived drama, blowing things out of proportion, or just manufacturing issues. But then there is good drama, well written and executed, and it can move people. It can inspire, build up, or fortify the listener. It can change minds, it can wake people up, it can cause an uprising of emotion or energy to carry people through.

When I started meditating on this, I asked my friends online about dramatic speeches that have moved them. While I typed that request, I could hear Doctor Who in the next room, there was a marathon playing, and it happened to be one of my favorite of his speeches, full of righteousness and humor. Bear with me, you don't need to know anything about Doctor Who. He is standing in the center of Stonehenge, surrounded by all the enemies he has accumulated over 34 seasons. A lot of them. And they were heading right for him. His friends understandably lost heart, they wanted to flee from such danger! He picked up a mic and demanded their attention.

He said,

Now, the question for the hour is, "Who's got the Pandorica?" Answer: I do. Next question: "Who's coming to take it from me?" Come on, look at me! No plan, no backup, no weapons worth a damn, oh, and something else I don't have: anything to lose! So, if you're sitting up there in your silly little space ships with all your silly little guns, and you've got any plans on taking the Pandorica tonight, just remember who's standing in your way! Remember every black day I ever stopped you, and then, *and then*, do the smart thing! Let somebody else try first.

Then he dropped the mic and walked off. And of course, they all ran away, and he inspired his friends who were just moments before scared beyond reason.

Sports movies can do this drama really well. It must be a required scene, the locker room speech from the coach before the big game or during halftime. While I am more of a soccer fan, it is a football movie that comes to the forefront for me. Any Given Sunday, a movie about the issues of a pro football team, the rifts and clashes, and their reconciliation. The moment the team was able to come back together was that locker room dramatic speech at halftime given by Al Pacino. He starts with the everything comes down to today, the team has to decide if they are going to just give up or crawl back into the light together. He admitted his own mistakes, and bared himself to his team.

Then he compared life to the game, saying:

You find out life's this game of inches, so is football. Because in either game - life or football - the margin for error is so small. I mean, one half a step too late or too early and you don't quite make it. One half second too slow, too fast and you don't quite catch it. The inches we need are everywhere around us. They're in every break of the game, every minute, every second. On this team we fight for that inch. On this team we tear ourselves and everyone else around us to pieces for that inch. We claw with our fingernails for that inch. Because we know when add up all those inches, that's gonna make the difference between winning and losing! Between living and dying! I'll tell you this, in any fight it's the guy whose willing to die whose gonna win that inch. And I know, if I'm gonna have any life anymore it's because I'm still willing to fight and die for that inch, because that's what living is, the six inches in front of your face. Now I can't make you do it. You've got to look at the guy next to you, look into his eyes. Now I think ya going to see a guy who will go that inch with you. Your gonna see a guy who will sacrifice himself for this team, because he knows when it comes down to it your gonna do the same for him. That's a team, gentlemen, and either, we heal, now, as a team, or we will die as individuals. That's football guys, that's all it is. Now, what are you gonna do?

And because it is a movie, they came together, put aside their egos, and played like a team again, and won. Even though it was a movie, the message still applies, and it affected me a lot. Made me think about things. That dramatic moment was useful and effective.

My friends suggested many speeches, but what stopped the list was one friend who swooped in and said, “Aren't they all just versions of St. Crispin's Day with King Henry?” The one with, “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers...”

And she was right. All of these dramatic speeches gave heart to the disheartened, and inspired some action. Certainly they are much better than the contrivances on television, or the overblown nonsense online. Though the ideal would be that we not have any drama in our lives, if we find ourselves in such a situation where it is necessary or would be beneficial, may we show the same courage that Queen Esther had, when the stakes were at their highest, she risked her all, and stood up, and saved her people from destruction. Even though Queen Esther was a drama queen, her courage was an example for us all.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

God of salvation, who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost, hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day, receiving these petitions and thanksgivings with your unending compassion.

We thank You for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have sent to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving others, seeing to their needs. We thank you for the generous donations that will help us our neighbors in need.

We know we are not perfect, so we pray for the forgiveness of our missteps. We pray for your guidance to live our lives in more loving ways.

We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those who are burdened, by troubles of mind, body, or spirit. We pray for their unburdening, we pray for their caregivers. We pray for those who are lost, so that they may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they have kept us safe. And we pray that you help us to be instruments of your divine love.

We are reminded of all in world who need our prayers. We pray for the refugees around the world, both home & abroad, please see them to safer places, and we give thanks to those who provide them shelter. We pray for those who are enduring drought, famine, or a lack of basic necessities. We pray for the oppressed. We pray for all to have a safe place.

We especially pray for:

Redeeming Sustainer, visit your people and pour out your strength and courage upon us, that we may hurry to make you welcome not only in our concern for others, but by serving them generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.

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

7:1 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther.

7:2 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."

7:3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favor, 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.

7:4 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."

7:5 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?"

7:6 Esther said, "A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

7:9 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."

7:10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

9:20 Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far,

9:21 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,

9:22 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.