

AND WHO KNOWS  
WHETHER YOU HAVE NOT  
COME TO THE KINGDOM  
FOR SUCH A TIME AS  
THIS?"

Esther 4:14

For a Time Such as This  
Esther  
Preached FCCW 9-27-2015

In Germany, between the two World Wars,  
a former U-Boat commander graduated from seminary  
to become one of the most prominent Lutheran Pastors  
that his nation produced.

Like many of his countrymen,  
he was passionately patriotic.

Resentful at the humiliation suffered by his homeland  
after its defeat in the First World War,  
and at the perceived internal threat  
posed by non-Christian minorities

such as Jews, Socialists and Communists,  
he welcomed Adolph Hitler's rise to power.  
Believing that Hitler could restore Germany to her former greatness,  
he used his position in the church to support  
the Fuhrer's persecution of non-Aryans  
in return for Hitler's personal word that  
the Church would be protected and that  
there would be no anti-Church laws under the Third Reich.

Despite that promise,  
he himself was eventually imprisoned by the SS.

Reflecting on that decision to not oppose  
the persecution of undesirable minorities  
in exchange for his own,  
and his faith community's favored status,  
this Church leader would later write:

"I am paying for that mistake now;  
and not me alone,  
but thousands of other persons like me."

But, it was another expression of this Pastor's deep regret  
about failing to stand up to evil  
that has endured as a warning to generations since.

His name was Martin Niemoller,  
and this is what he is most remembered for writing:

"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out--  
because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out--  
because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out--  
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me--  
and there was no one left to speak for me."  
Niemoller knew the Bible well.  
I wonder if, in his prison cell,  
he turned to the Book of Esther,  
and there found a warning he might have heeded  
about ignoring injustice done to others  
in order to preserve one's own security?  
The Book of Esther is a biblical oddity.  
Because God is not referred to even once in the whole story!  
You can read Esther from beginning to end  
and you won't find God mentioned -- anywhere.  
Yet, when you read between the lines of Esther  
you can't help but sense that in this story,  
God is at work -- everywhere!  
For a young Jewish orphan named Hadesseh,  
living in exile in the Persian Empire,  
God's work in her life began in an unusual way.  
A beauty contest.  
King Ahasuerus, ruler of the Persian Empire,  
had ditched his wife, Queen Vashti,  
because of her refusal to be treated like a "trophy wife"  
for the amusement of his drunken buddies.  
To find a replacement for Vashti  
he orders a huge beauty contest be held,  
with beautiful young virgins from every  
province of the empire as contestants.  
It was like a "Miss Persia" Pageant,  
with the winner to wear - not a beauty queen's tiara,

but an actual Queen's crown.

Well, Hadesseh gets swept up in the dragnet

of young beautiful virgins

and entered into the beauty contest.

And she wins.

She becomes the new queen of Persia.

Queen Esther.

Because, Esther was the Persian name she went by

in order to downplay her Jewish identity

and fit in with the culture around her.

Esther had an uncle named Mordecai,

who raised her like his own daughter.

Mordecai had once saved the king's life,

by blowing the whistle on a plot to assassinate him,

which won him the king's gratitude.

But Mordecai had made a bitter enemy

in King Ahasuerus' highest official,

who was named Haman.

If you ran into Haman on the street

you were supposed to bow down to him

to demonstrate respect for his position.

Mordecai refused to do this,

which really got under Haman's skin.

I guess Haman had a big ego.

Still, taking revenge on the man who had saved the King's life--

not such a good way for Haman to stay on the King's good side.

So, instead of singling out Mordecai,

Haman convinces the king that all Jews are a threat

and should all be exterminated.

The Jews in Persia did what many ethnic and religious minorities before and since have done.

They settled together in their own neighborhoods, where they followed their religious traditions and preserved their cultural identity.

But, they did not pose a threat to the Persian majority.

Still, Haman managed to plant the seeds of fear and distrust in the King's mind, that because the Jews were different, that made them dangerous.

Soon, couriers are dispatched to all the provinces of the empire, carrying the King's order that a special day would be designated for the annihilation of Jews of everywhere.

When word of this gets to Mordecai, he sends Esther a message, telling her what is going to happen to her people, and urging Esther to use her position to change the king's mind.

Esther points out that fulfilling Mordecai's request was not without certain serious risks.

First, by law, nobody, not even the Queen, goes in to see the king unless they are personally summoned. Violating that rule carried a death sentence.

She remembered how her predecessor, Vashti had lost her crown, for angering the king.

There was also the tricky detail of Esther being a Jew herself.

You see, she had kept that secret from everyone in the palace.

Exposing her Jewishness could also get her executed  
under the terms of the King's edict  
against all the Jews in the Kingdom.

Mordecai sends another message to her.

In it 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 a time such as this,  
relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews  
from another quarter.

And you may even find yourself excluded  
from that deliverance."

"Who knows?" Mordecai says,

"Perhaps you have come to royal dignity  
for just such a time as this."

Mordecai believes that it was no accident  
that Esther ended up on Vashti's throne.

That there was something bigger than  
her good looks and good luck,  
behind her being chosen as queen

.

If the chain of events that lifted Esther  
from obscurity to royalty were not random;  
if there was a purpose and a design  
to the trajectory of her life,  
that could only mean one thing.

God had brought her to this window of opportunity.

Not only for herself,  
but also for her people.

Which meant that not lifting a finger to prevent  
the genocide about to happen,  
was more than a betrayal of her people.

It was also an abandonment of God,  
who had given her this opportunity to be  
God's instrument for saving His people.

Martin Luther King, Jr., who knew a thing or two himself  
about taking risks in order to respond to God's call;  
a call to do the right thing for a people  
who desperately needed someone like him to be a leader,  
once said,

"The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice."

If that is the case, then any person, any event,  
can be a point on that arc.

Who's to say that the bending of the arc of history toward justice  
isn't sometimes done through -- ordinary people,  
who find themselves providentially poised  
in the right place, at the right time,  
to do the next right thing  
that is necessary for God's Kingdom.

That possibility was what brought Mordecai  
to Esther's doorstep with a desperate plea.

He wanted her to see that her position afforded her  
a unique opportunity to thwart a great evil  
and participate in God's liberating justice for her people.

To respond to this opportunity carried risks.

To confront the injustice that hovered over her people  
demanded courage.

Choosing what God calls us to do often does.

Esther could do the safe thing.

She could keep her silence and save herself.

She could let her uncle die.

She could allow her people to perish.

But she doesn't.

She summons the courage to act.

She "outs" herself as a Jew before the king and his court.

She identifies herself with those who are rejected and oppressed rather than with those of power and privilege.

She pleads for the revocation of the King's order against the Jews.

And the king grants her request!

Her people are saved!

Her faith and her courage are rewarded.

And to this day, the courage she demonstrated

is celebrated by Jews worldwide in the annual festival called Purim.

You and I may not walk the corridors of power like Esther did.

But we worship the same God that she did;

the God who works --

sometimes decisively through spectacular miracles --

and sometimes anonymously,

through un-extraordinary,

but courageously faithful people,

like you or me.

The God who came to deliver all of us,

came to us, not as a King or a Queen,

but as man of low birth who was not afraid

to identify himself with all the rejected and oppressed

everywhere on earth.

A man who chose to not keep silent about



the injustices around him,  
despite the risks.

Esther was made a queen just for times such as she lived in.

Has God placed you in the place you are for a time such as you are living in?

There is no shortage of paranoia today,  
towards minorities of different religions and national origins,  
and concern about where that may lead.

We can ask, "Where is God?"

"Why doesn't God do something?"

When maybe what we should be asking is, "Where am I?"

What advantages or opportunities has God given me  
that make me suited as a candidate for accomplishing God's purposes?

"How might I "out myself" as a Christian by standing faithfully  
for the sake of God's justice,  
the way Esther outed herself as a Jew?

And what might be the consequences  
of my ignoring those possibilities?

For others, and for myself,  
who will always have to live with myself  
for the choice I made.

Edmund Burke once said:

"The only thing necessary for the triumph [of evil]  
is for good [people] to do nothing."

Does it surprise you that the purpose of your life could possibly be  
far greater than what you might imagine it to be?

Read between the lines of Esther's story  
and that is the message you will find.

Read between the lines of your life today, and ask yourself:

What connections might there be between

the opportunities and challenges of this time in which you live,  
and the person God is calling you to be.

What can we learn, from Martin Niemoller's regret,  
and from how God was at work in Esther's situation,  
so that you and I might be God's instrument of justice,  
for a time, such as this time?