

People Like Us, for Times Like These

Esther 4:6-14

Have you ever thought about how many choices and decisions you make in the course of a day? Probably not, because most of them are pretty inconsequential. Other choices though, can be life altering. For ourselves and others. For Christians, there is an added consideration when it comes to making choices. Not only how will this decision affect me, or someone else – but what is God’s will for me in this situation? Figuring out where God is in the equation can serve to either simplify, or complicate a decision. Just ask Harry.

Harry was on his way to church in his little two-seater sports car. It was a morning like many mornings we had this Summer - with lots of rain. As Harry was driving by a bus stop, he saw three bedraggled people from his church waiting there, huddled under a single umbrella in the torrential rain. One was old Mrs. Fletcher. She still insisted on getting to church by herself, despite her arthritis. Which was always worse in wet weather like this. There was Dr. Jones. A year earlier Dr Jones had treated Harry for a rare and dangerous disease. Harry virtually owed Dr. Jones his life. And the third person was Judith. Harry had had a crush on Judith for the past 6 months; ever since she joined their church. But had never had the courage or the opportunity to ask her out. Was God giving him the opening for which he had hoped and prayed? Harry knew who *he* wanted in that single passenger’s seat. But, would God want him to pick up Judith and leave Mrs. Fletcher and Dr. Jones to fend for themselves in the rain?

In the brief moment he had to make up his mind, the answer came to Harry. He pulled to the curb in front of the bus stop, jumped out, tossed the keys to Dr. Jones, helped Mrs. Fletcher into the passenger seat, then waved them both good-bye as he huddled close to Judith under the umbrella to wait for the next bus.

The Book of Esther is all about making the difficult choices between what we’d like to do, and what God calls us to do. That message may not jump right out at you when you read Esther; because God is not referred to even once in the whole story! Kind of strange for a book of the Bible, don’t you think? But, It’s true. You can read Esther from front to back and you won’t find a single mention of God, or people praying, anywhere. Yet, when you read between the lines of Esther you can’t help but sense that in this story, God’s fingerprints are all over the place.

Sometimes, a crossroads moment in life calls for a decision from us. You feel that God has brought you to this point for a reason, and that the choice of which direction to take comes down to what you will do with the opportunity God is giving you. God sometimes opens a window of opportunity before us to be a part of something important. But we have to be willing to go through the window to make it happen.

For a young Jewish orphan with the Persian name of Esther, that window was thrown open by an unlikely chain of improbable events, beginning with of all things, a royal scandal and a beauty contest. The King of the Persian Empire, had ditched his wife, Queen Vashti: and

declared a colossal beauty contest to find a replacement for her. Because Esther's Jewish DNA wasn't obvious, and because she went by a good Persian name, she gets entered into the pageant. And she wins. She becomes the new queen of Persia.

Cloistered in the royal palace, Esther doesn't know that the King has issued an edict that all Jews in the Empire should be put to death. But Esther had a cousin named Mordecai, who sends Esther a message about what is going to happen to her people. Mordecai urges Esther to use her royal position to change the king's mind and save her people. Esther's reply is that Mordecai is overestimating her influence with the King. She reminds her cousin that by law nobody was permitted to enter the King's presence without a personal summons from his Royal Highness. Defying that law was punishable by death. Unless the King held out his golden scepter to pardon them. And the King had not summoned her to his presence in a month.

Mordecai thinks this is a poor excuse for her not trying to save all the Jews in the Empire. He warns her: "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 behind her being chosen as queen than her good looks and uncanny good luck. Who knows? 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 fairy tale trajectory of her life, and if God had brought her to this window of opportunity not only for herself, but also, for her people.

Esther could do the safe thing. She could keep her silence and save herself. But she doesn't. She summons the courage to act. She "outs" herself as a Jew before the king and his court. She pleads for the revocation of the King's order against the Jews. And what she does results in the deliverance of her people!

Who knows, maybe life is full of opportunities for *us* to use who we are and what resources are available to us in service to others and for God's purpose. Esther was made a queen just for times such as she lived in. Where has God placed you for a time such as you live?

This past year and a half have been some pretty extraordinary times. We might ask, "Where is God?"

"Why doesn't God do something?"

We might also ask, "Where am *I*? What advantages or opportunities has God given *me* that could be used for God's purposes? How might God use *me* to change the way things are?"

Maybe people like us are just what God can use for times like these. 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 faithful people. Maybe God is calling you to take some more active role in the church.

For the past year or two, several church committees have been faithfully trying to do sustain the ministry of the church with vacancies. Vacancies that could be filled with people who might make a difference in what those committees contribute to the overall ministry of this church. What if you are just the right person, in the right place, at the right time to change that? What if your time, your talents, your energy, your creativity are exactly what is needed to more evenly distribute the responsibility for the work and witness of this congregation? And if you feel like you don't have much of any of those things to offer—the way that Esther didn't believe she could make a difference—simply offering the faithful willingness to make yourself available might reveal God's invisible fingerprints all over and around you; even surprising yourself with the importance of your presence and effort.

Sometimes, we need Mordecais in *our* lives, don't we? We need the guidance of other people, or of communities we belong to, to help us discern what God is up to in our lives where we have not the slightest inclination that God might be involved. You and I need someone to see the possibilities in us that we fail to see in ourselves. Without our Mordecais, not only might we be denying others whatever hidden strengths we have to offer them. We might also be cheating *ourselves* out of the fulfillment that comes with seeing how much good God can do through us.

Please prayerfully consider volunteering for, or saying yes when asked to serve on a committee or office. Who knows but that the purpose of your life is far greater than what you might imagine it to be. Ministers aren't the only ones with a call to ministry. Congregationalism grew out of the conviction that the Holy Spirit works through each and every member in the pews.

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 this question: How might God be creating a window of opportunity for me – yes, me - to be God's chosen person, just for a time, such as this time?

Because God relies on people like us, in times such as these.

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