

Tomorrow, we celebrate Memorial Day. For many of us, it is a day off, which is a much-needed, long awaited, 3-day weekend—a reason to cookout and invite friends over. But for those who have lost someone because of war or military action, it means much more than a day off. As we prepare to hear the story of Esther, we first remember those who sacrificed their lives for our country. We also acknowledge those men and women who are serving our country right now and give our heartfelt thanks to them. Thank you!

Today, we have the story of Esther. It is our second to the last story from the Old Testament in the Bible. Like the story of Daniel, the story of Esther describes the intrigue and conflict involved as the Jews live in foreign lands.

The context of today's story is this: The Persians brought the Babylonian Empire to an end. The Persian King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their city, including the temple in Jerusalem. However, most Jews remained in the places to which they'd been exiled, including the family of a man named Mordecai. The story of Esther focuses on the Jews who did not return to Jerusalem with Governor Zerubbabel.

Today's story begins with King Xerxes of Persia hosting a huge party, which his Queen Vashti refuses to attend. Her refusal results in Xerxes banishing her and necessitates a search for a new queen. Beautiful women throughout the kingdom came forward and auditioned. And one of them is a Jewish woman named Esther, who has been raised by her cousin Mordecai. Esther won everyone's heart, including the king's. Xerxes made Esther Queen, but he did not know she was Jewish.

Soon after Esther became Queen, Mordecai learned of a plot to kill the king. He passed the news to Esther, and the plot was foiled. However, the story has a villain. King Xerxes' right-hand man, Haman, reveled in his high standing and enjoyed having all the other royal officials kneel to him. When Mordecai refused, Haman was enraged. To exact his revenge, Haman tricked the king into issuing a decree to exterminate Mordecai and his people, the entire Jewish population in Persia.

Once Mordecai learned of Haman's genocidal plans, he put on a sackcloth and ashes and set about weeping and wailing through the streets of Susa. When Esther learned of Mordecai's demonstration, she wondered about its reasons. Mordecai told her of Haman's diabolical plans to destroy God's people. Mordecai counseled Esther that she had to go to the king to request mercy for her people.

Esther is afraid. Approaching the king unbidden is a capital offense forgiven only by the king, and, although she's the queen, there's no guarantee she'll receive his mercy. After all, he didn't forgive the last queen. Mordecai rebuked Esther for her self-indulgent and self-preserving mindset by saying,

“Do not think that because you are in the king's house, you, alone of all the Jews, will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position **for such a time as this?**” (Esther 4:13-14).

Mordecai's point is clear—her life *may potentially* be lost if she goes to the king, but it *will certainly* be lost if she doesn't. Perhaps with mixed motives of self-preservation and missional calling, she replied,

“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf... Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).

At this moment, Esther goes from being a young woman making compromises to a mature queen giving orders. Tim Keller, an American theologian, notes that her response is the language of identification, mission, and obedience. **Mordecai's call to action causes her to realize that she's not in the palace for herself but for others.**

Overcoming her fear with prayers and conviction, Esther spoke to the king. Ultimately, it was Haman who ended up dying instead of Mordecai and his people. Through her beauty and courage, they were saved.

From this story, we hear two well-known phrases—**"For such a time as this"** (Esther 4:14) and **"If I perish, I perish"** (Esther 4:16).

Once again, the phrase **"for such a time as this"** is a quotation from Mordecai's rebuke to Esther for her self-indulgent and her self-preserving mindset. Esther was being reproofed for living large and embracing royalty over service. Through those

words, "**for such a time as this**," Mordecai was reminding Esther that she had been chosen to set her own interests aside, let go of her own ambitions and face the challenges of others.

She was asked to risk her life and her legacy with no guarantees of a positive outcome for others. That's the "**for such a time as this**" Esther was challenged to accept. And that's the "**for such a time as this**" God also sets before us.

**"For such a time as this..."** ...at these massive challenges facing us:

- Global challenges about intercultural understanding, poverty, climate change, COVID and other diseases.
- Ecclesial challenges about standing for doctrine and justice, unity and truth.
- United Methodist Church challenges about pursuing the mission of God without forgetting to do no harm, about proclaiming God's unconditional love for all people without excluding anyone.
- And the economic challenges, ethnic/racial challenges, and the challenges of morals and ethics.
- Aren't we tired of hearing that someone innocent is being killed by a gun shooting every week? Just imagine this: As the sun rises in the morning, countless families in America this week are shattered as their children's beds are empty. Instead of helping their precious ones get dressed up for school, they are planning for their funerals. Just imagine this: Our beloved ones didn't return home from work, grocery shopping, or church because they were killed.

**"For such a time as this..."** God has given us our job, position, resources, education, and more. God has placed us where we are "**for such a time as this..."** Can we hear God speaking to us for such a time as this?

Let us pause for a moment now to hear God speaking to us for such a time as this. **[Pause]** May we hear God speaking to us, offering us the blessed privilege of "saving God's people" through our courageous acts of obedience for such a time as this. **"If I perish, I perish."** Let it be so. Amen.