

BACKGROUND – 2 October 2016

(Reading: Esther 4)

We read about Esther this morning in our Bible reading. She was also an orphan. But luckily, in her society, no-one was really an orphan, because the families had to look after all the children in their clan whose parents have died. So, in that regard, Esther was looked after by her uncle Mordecai, who always served her best interests.

She also found a grand palace to live in. The king liked her so much she became his queen. But other people did not like her culture and nationality, especially one man called Haman. He did not like the Jews and wanted to kill all of them. So Esther's uncle heard of this special command by the king to kill all the Jews, young and old on a specific day. He had only one option, namely, to go to Esther and ask her to tell the king that she is Jewish and maybe persuade him to help their nation. But no-one could just go to the king whenever they wanted. If you decided to go to the king without his invite and, when he saw you, did not call your name, then you were to be killed. So Esther risked her own life to go unannounced to the king. But before she did it, she asked all her people to fast before God. Fasting was a practice to help them focus on their relationship with God, sacrificing food to show God their dedication to serve him alone.

She did not go on her own. She trusted in God and through faith asked God to go with her.

In the end the king did not kill her. He invited her to tell him what she wanted. She said she wanted him and Haman to come for lunch. At the lunch he asked her again what she wanted, but then she said she wants him and Haman to come to another meal the next day. Then at that meal she will tell him what she wanted. So that night the king could not sleep and they read to him all the stories of his rule. He then heard that Esther's uncle saved his life and was never rewarded. The king bumped into Haman the next morning and asked him how he could honour anyone who has done great works for the king. He responded by coming up with an elaborate plan of honouring. He did not know it was not him that the king was talking about. So when he heard that it was Mordecai, he was furious.

At the next meal, Esther told the king that she was a Jew and that she and her people would be killed by the decree that was the work of Haman. The king could not alter or change his command. But he listened to her and in the end, with her advice, sent out another decree whereby he gave the Jews permission to defend themselves against all those who wanted to kill them.

Because she trusted in God, she did not only save her own life but the lives of her whole nation.

SERMON

The text for the sermon Esther 4:14: “Yet who knows—maybe it was for a time like this that you were made queen!”

Interesting story, isn't it? Almost like a fairy tale. Except – it really happened, and it was such an important part of the people of God's history that they devoted a whole book in the Bible to it. And they still celebrate the festival of Purim/Pur - a lot, lottery, a festival instituted by the Jews (Esther 9:24–32) in ironical commemoration of Haman's consultation of the Pur (a Persian word), for the purpose of ascertaining the auspicious day for executing his cruel plot against their nation. It became a national institution by the common consent of the Jews, and is observed by them to the present day, on the 14th and 15th of the month Adar, a month before the Passover.

But I want to tell you something interesting about this story – did you know that the name of God is not even mentioned once in the book Esther?

What is this book doing in the Bible then, you may wonder? But did you notice how many things in this story happened by chance?

- Was it coincidence that when the king was looking for a new wife, a Jew was the most beautiful girl in his kingdom?
- Was it coincidence that Esther's uncle heard about the plot to kill the king?
- Was it coincidence that he was not rewarded for what he did earlier?
- Was it coincidence that the king was in a good mood when Esther approached him without being summoned?
- Was it coincidence that the king couldn't sleep the night before Esther's dinner party?
- Was it coincidence that the prime minister was the very first person the king saw that morning and then ordered him to honour the person he hated most?

And I could go on like this forever.

The question is – does a child of God believe that things happen by chance?

Although God's name is not even mentioned once in this story, it is as clear as daylight that the whole time there was *Somebody* steering things in the right direction. There, from behind the curtains, somebody made sure that His will was done – and He did not do that by means of earth shattering miracles, but plainly by using people.

And exactly that same thing happens to us today. We often find ourselves in situations where it is really hard for us to see God in our lives, when we wonder if He is even there at all. Just like Esther must have felt many, many times in her life. But just like in the story of Esther – it doesn't mean that if we cannot see God, he isn't there.

God is always there – sometimes on the forefront – sometimes in the background, but He never ever leaves his children alone.

In fact, I think it might be difficult for us to see God sometimes today, because we are not always that keen on doing what God expects us to do. And if God wants to make himself known through us, and we don't do that – how on earth will people be able to see God here on earth?

God chose to let His will be done here on earth by means of using people – by means of using Esther and her uncle, by means of using you and me.

The story of Esther thus reminds us that we can always depend on God – no matter *what* we have to face, we do not have to face it alone. Nothing ever happens by chance – there is a reason for everything that happens to you, even if you don't understand it at the time. But it also reminds us that God created each one of us for a purpose, that He wants to use us here on earth.

In the time of crisis, Esther's uncle said to her: *Who knows—maybe it was for a time like this that you were made queen!* And today I want to say to you: *Who knows – maybe it was for a time like this that you are in the situation you are at the moment;*

Maybe it was for a time like this that you are a member of this Church;

Maybe it was for a time like this that you set foot in this Church for the first time ever;

Maybe it was for a time like this that I am being called to Balerno Parish Church.....

Remember: nothing ever happens by chance but from God's sustaining fatherly hand!

May we go out and rely on God. Life is like a big puzzle. God sees the whole puzzle. We only see the pieces. So all we can do is to trust and obey, for really there is no other way!

Amen