



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

Reading Esther 3:12-14, 4:1-17

Sermon: 27 September 2009

The text for the sermon

Esther 4:14: "Yet who knows—maybe it was for a time like this that you were made queen!"¹

Long, long ago, in a country far from here, there lived a beautiful young girl, named Esther. She was taken captive (along with all her people) and had to live in a foreign land reigned by a foreign king...

Sounds a little like a fairy tale, doesn't it? But it was nothing like that. Because this young girl was an orphan, not a princess (or not yet, in any case). And the only thing she really had going for her was her beauty and a loving uncle who always kept an eye on her.

But let me continue with the story. The foreign king loved hosting parties. And at one of these parties, where the wine has been flowing freely all day long, he decided that he wanted to show off his beautiful wife. And even though she knew better, she refused to go. That infuriated the king so much that he immediately got rid of her.

But as things go, the king got lonely after a while, and he decided to host a beauty contest so he could choose himself a new wife. And guess who won the competition? The beautiful, young, orphan, Esther.

So that is how Esther became the queen. But in those days and in that palace it was no fairy tale to be the queen – because the queen (like all other women in those days) practically had no rights at all. She couldn't even *talk* to her husband when she had the desire to do so – she was only allowed to see her husband when he summoned her. And most probably because there wasn't much talking going on between them, the new queen never even mentioned to the king that she was of Jewish origin...

In the meantime, the king's prime minister started building up a grudge towards the new queen's uncle (without knowing who he was, obviously), because he didn't bow down in respect when the prime minister approached, like everybody else did. Esther's uncle was not disobedient by nature, he was just a devout Jew, and they bowed down before nobody but God.

Esther's uncle's attitude bothered the self-indulged prime minister SO much, that he decided to make a plan to get rid of him. And while he was at it, he thought, why not get rid of all the Jews? And because the king was much more interested in his drinking parties than in running his

¹American Bible Society: *The Holy Bible : The Good News Translation*. 2nd ed. New York : American Bible Society, 1992, S. Es 4:12-14

kingdom fairly, he didn't even think twice when his prime minister asked him to sign a decree that on a certain date all the Jews could be massacred. The prime minister was SO pleased that he even started building a huge gallows to hang Esther's uncle on.

In the meantime, Esther found out from her uncle about the massacre. Like all the other Jews, she was devastated. But even more so when her uncle told her that *she* was the only person who could do something about it...

Although she had absolutely no power and influence in the castle, she knew that her uncle was right – She was the only person who had a shot at saving the Jews, she had to do *something!*

According to the law, anybody who went to the king without being summoned (even his wife), would immediately be sentenced with the death penalty, except if the king was pleased to see them. And since the king hasn't summoned Esther for longer than a month, she could only assume that he had a different woman to occupy his attention.

But Esther plucked up all her courage, dressed herself as beautifully as she could, and went to the king. She knew that she was going to die anyway because she was a Jew, so she could just as well give it her best shot.

Much to Esther's surprise, the minute the king laid his eyes on her, he fell in love with her all over again! And before she even opened her mouth he promised to give her whatever she wanted – even if that was half of his kingdom.

Because Esther knew the king well, she decided not to be hasty, and invited him and his prime minister to dinner the next evening.

But that night, the king couldn't sleep. Guilty conscience maybe? So he asked one of his servants to read him a bedtime story. The servant chose to read from a book retelling the recent history of the kingdom, and so it happened that the king heard how Esther's uncle saved his life when he uncovered a plot two palace officials had to assassinate the king. And he also realised that Esther's uncle has never been rewarded for what he did.

The first person the king saw the next morning was his prime minister. He asked *him* how somebody very brave and special could be rewarded, and of course thinking that the king was planning to reward *him*, the prime minister suggested a fancy parade throughout the city. Then the king asked the prime minister to lead such a parade in honour of Esther's uncle. The prime minister couldn't believe his ears! What a humiliation!

At least he had dinner to look forward to at the king's and queen's. But that didn't work out like he thought it would either! Because after a lovely meal and many glasses of wine, Esther told the king about the implications of the prime minister's plan to wipe out her people – including *her*, of course.

The king was furious! He immediately ordered that the prime minister be hanged on the gallows outside the palace – the very gallows he built for Esther's uncle! But because no decree could be made invalid, the king declared another decree, giving the Jews the opportunity to defend themselves on that dreadful day.

And in the end, this story had a happy ending – the Jews had such a big victory on the very day they were supposed to be wiped out from the face of the earth, that they still celebrate it today.

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.

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 shuddering 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 Ester must have felt many many times in her life. But just like in the story of Ester – 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 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 an 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 with 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 BB officer or members of the BB

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

Remember: nothing ever happens by chance but from Gods sustaining fatherly hand!

Amen

Next week's suggested readings.

Job 1:1
Job 2:1-10
Psalm 26
Hebrews 1:1-4
Hebrews 2:5-12
Mark 10:2-16

Prayer by Susan Kramer

May I remember

A (Christian) friend I am
When coming to another's place of unrest
With affection and warmth of caring.

A (Christian) friend I am
When listening openly, non-judgmentally
When judgment would be easy.

A (Christian) friend I am
When taking extra time
To lend a helping hand, though busy.

A (Christian) friend I am
When feeling your need
I act for you
As I would for myself.

Amen