

Holy Cross Lutheran Church  
Livestream Adult Bible Class  
May 23, 2021  
Esther 5:1- 6:13

“For such a time as this,” Esther has come to the throne as Queen of the Persian Empire. She embraces the challenge set before her to come before the king and ask him to cancel the edict against the Jewish people of the realm. But Esther is not rash or hasty in coming before the king. Chapter 4 ends with Esther entering a 3 day fast and calling on the Jews of Susa to join her. Only after taking that time, which was clearly more than just a time without food, does she begin to put the plan into action. In Esther 5, the queen shows herself to be a person of great courage and one who carefully plans what will be the defining moment of her life.

### Invited to a Feast - Esther 5:1-8

At the end of the third day of fasting, Esther dons her royal robes. Her goal is not to be eye-candy for the King, but to show the seriousness of the request she is about to present to him. Dressed in her splendor, she goes to the inner court of the palace, but does not barge in on the king unannounced. Instead, she stands in the court and waits to be noticed.

Esther is noticed and “won favour” in the eyes of the king. He extends his golden scepter toward her and allows her to approach. She touches the tip of the scepter as a sign of respect and the king is eager to hear her request.

Perhaps to her surprise she is given freedom to request anything, up to half the kingdom. This largesse is not to be taken literally. The king exaggerates for effect, similar to Herod Antipas in the New Testament who promises the same thing to Herodias’s daughter when she dances for Herod at his birthday bash.

As it turns out Esther does not, at this point, have a huge request. She simply asks that the King and Haman attend a banquet that evening in her chambers. As we already know the King loves a good feast, so Haman is summoned and off they go to dinner.

Later, as everyone enjoys an after-dinner glass of wine, the king repeats his offer to grant whatever Esther wishes up to half her kingdom. Once again Esther defers. Instead of making the big request for her people, she simply invites the King and Haman to a second feast to be held the next day.

What is notable about the second request is the shrewdness Esther shows in the wording. ***“My petition and my request is this: If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question.”***

***if*** the king regards me with favour and ***if*** it pleases the king to grant my request ...

Esther has in a very real way won “preapproval” for her request. By phrasing her request as she does, she assures herself that if the king comes to the second banquet, he is guaranteeing his openness to whatever she has in mind.

In these verses Esther steps out in faith and takes a huge risk. But we see that she is also shrewd about how she does this. She does not throw caution to the wind and barge into the king’s court; she does not lash out in anger and she slowly moves the process along.

While one always needs to be careful when interpreting the Bible to distinguish between what is descriptive (a story, for example) and what is prescriptive (a command of God), there are important points for us to remember when the time comes for us to step out in faith in our own lives. Like Esther we balance bold faith with thoughtful, careful, planning.

Jesus calls his disciples to a great and bold mission and reminds them that we live by faith and not by sight. Yet at the same time he encourages us to be shrewd and thoughtful as we go about the work given to us.

- “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” – Matthew 10:16
- “The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.” -- Luke 16:8-9

Stepping out in faith is not necessarily a totally blind leap! Even Jesus, who takes the ultimate step of faith, commending himself into the hands of the Father while dying on the cross, can only do this in full assurance that he is doing the Father’s will.

### **Joy Turned to Anger - Esther 5:9-14**

The next 20 hours (or thereabouts) between the first feast and the second are pretty busy. While both Haman and the King leave Esther’s chambers in a good mood, it does not last for long.

Haman leaves the palace in a merry mood, but then encounters Mordecai in the area around in Kings Gate and once again Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman or acknowledge his office. This fills Haman with rage and when he recounts the good things of his day to his wife, he says it is all for naught because Mordecai the Jew stubbornly refuses to bow to him.

Like some other women in the Bible, Zeresh has no trouble advising Haman what to do. Gallows are to be built 50 cubits (75 feet) high and the next day Haman will advise the king to hang Mordecai.

There is a delicious irony in how this all unfolds. The Book of Esther began with the edict that the man of the house was the king of his castle. But as the story unfolds, we see how unsustainable that is in real life. Even the second in command needs the counsel of his wife to handle his problems.

### **Sleepless Night for the King - A Miserable Day for Haman -- Esther 6:1-13**

Meanwhile back at the palace, the rich food has caused problems for the king – he cannot sleep. So in order to calm himself officials read to him from the book of memorable deeds. This volume listed out all the great things that had happened in the king’s reign. Among those big moments is the account of Mordecai informing the king, through Esther, of the plot against him by two of his guards.

As the story is read, the king learns he never honoured Mordecai for saving his life. The next day Haman is at work early (he might have even come in the dark of the night) and is getting ready to bring his request to hang Mordecai. Instead, the king summons Haman and asks him what should be done for a person the king wishes to honour. Haman assumes he is about to be honoured again and spells out a most lavish ceremony. Dress the honouree in the one of the king’s royal robes, put the person on a horse the king himself has ridden and lead him through the city proclaiming the king’s delight in this person.

Then, much to Haman’s shock and dismay, he learns he is not the one the king chooses to honour. Instead, it is Mordecai, the Jew. One can only imagine the chagrin with which Haman leads his archenemy through the city and proclaims the king’s favour upon him.

At the end of this parade Haman can’t even bring himself to go back to the palace, but rushes home filled with anger, shame and fear. If he was expecting his wife to lend a sympathetic ear, he was sadly disappointed!

***“Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, ‘If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.’”*** Esther 6:13

***Pride goes before destruction,  
and a haughty spirit before a fall.  
Proverbs 16:18***