

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Livestream Adult Bible Class
May 30, 2021
Esther 7:1-10

Haman the Agagite is in the middle of his very bad, awful, no good day. He his day began with plans to have Mordecai the Jew hung on 75-foot-high gallows he had constructed. But as he went to secure the king's permission for this act, he was told he was to lead the same Mordecai through the streets of Susa on the king's horse, wearing the king's robes, and proclaiming to all that Mordecai was honoured in the eyes of the king. After that humiliation Haman could only go home and hang his head in sorrow. If he was expecting a sympathetic ear, he is terribly disappointed! His wife and his friends sense Haman is coming to ruin and tell him so in no uncertain words. But then the officials come from the palace to escort him back for his second private feast with the King and Esther. Maybe things won't be so bad after all?

Turning the Tables - Esther 7:1-6

Many centuries separate us from Haman and history tends to dull the memory of true the nature of a person, it is important for us to remember that Haman was a man with an unending thirst for power and greatly needed the outward respect of others. His whole plot against the Jews is based not on culture, as it is on the fact that one man will not bow down to him. Haman is a narcissist of the highest order. If even one person gets in his way, he will do whatever he needs to do to assert himself, grab power and assert it. As such he deserves a place on humanity's wall of infamy and shame right beside mass murders, tyrannical despots, and tin-pot dictators. Mordecai and Esther have aligned themselves to overturn this man and his evil machinations.

Haman was escorted to the banquet according to the customs of the empire (this also happens in the Joseph stories – Genesis 43). The meal progressed as had the supper the previous evening and finally over wine, the king again asks Esther, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

Esther's response again reveals her intelligence and shrewd command of her situation. "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request..." By beginning this way, she binds her fate to the fate of her people. Should the king deny her request, he is denying her life. As was the case at the pervious evening's banquet, she has backed the king into a corner; he pretty much has to grant the request, no matter what it is unless he plans to do in his wife and Queen.

One can imagine the king perhaps nodding and nudging Esther along, it's just about the only option he has. Then she drops the bombshell, **"For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."**

Again, we see extreme shrewdness. Esther and her people have been "sold." In ancient empires only the king had the right to determine the fates of people and by sending out his edict of destruction against the Jews, Haman has, in the eyes of Esther, committed treason.

But wasn't it the king who allowed Haman to send out the edict? Indeed, he did, but there is nothing to suggest that he even read the pronouncement before it went out and even though he had been told its contents, it is possible he was not really aware of what was being proposed. The Hebrew words for annihilate and enslave come from the same root and while neither Xerxes nor Haman spoke Hebrew, the force of Esther's choice of words here is to draw attention to some level of deception on Haman's part when he came to the king.

In any case, Esther again shows her skill with words to use the same basic phrase from the edit as she reports to the King the genocide to be committed. She goes on to add that had this merely been enslavement of her people she would not have troubled the king.

The King's only question is to determine who has ordered such a thing to be done and Esther quickly points the finger at Haman.

Haman's Downfall - Esther 7:7-10

The king needs a moment after the truth is out. He gets up from the table and heads out into the palace garden to clear his mind. Haman with nothing left to lose, pleads his case to the Queen, but even here he just digs himself into a deeper hole. His begging is very physical and when the king returns to the room, he mistakenly thinks Haman is trying to molest Esther, right in the palace.

With that Haman's face is covered for a second time that day, the sign of his ultimate shame. Harbona, one of the king's closest advisors steps forward to suggest that the quickest way to get rid of Haman would be to hang him on the gallows Haman had built outside his house. "So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided." – Esther 7:10

Bringing Down the Mighty - The Great Reversal

There is a certain poetic justice to seeing Haman get what he deserves for his treachery. To paraphrase Hamlet he is "hung on his own petard" and "made to drink from his own cup." But there is more here than the serving of justice. The theme of bringing down the mighty – the great reversal – is a theme throughout the entire Scripture and particularly the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament. Haman unwittingly gives us a textbook example of what Mary sings about in her song of praise known as the Magnificat in Luke 1:51-53

"He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty."

In Luke 6:20-26 Jesus speaks blessings and woes and in his own words talks of the great reversal.

²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

²⁵ “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

²⁶ “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

In addition, Luke includes unique episodes in Jesus’ ministry that illustrate the theme:

- Table manners – Luke 14:7-14
- Rich Man and Lazarus – 16:19-31
- The Pharisee and the Tax Collector – Luke 18:9-14

All of this is to remind us of how we come before God and one another, namely in humility. Unlike Haman who is all about power and position, the life of the Christian is marked by humility and service. This is a hard lesson for us to learn and in this life we will never get it right all the time.

However, the Great Reversal also has become the Great Exchange. For Christ, the one and only Son of God on high, came down from heaven and came to earth to be our brother. What did he do? He humbled himself. In the words of Philippians: “Christ Jesus . . . though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Jesus humbled himself by being lifted up on a cross. Jesus took your sins. He gives you his righteousness. This is what God the Father sent him to do. And he did it, for you and for the whole world. And after humbling himself in the greatest way, Jesus now is the most highly exalted. Again, from Philippians, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

By our Lord’s sacrificial self-humbling, and by his glorious resurrection and exaltation—because of what Christ has done, and through faith in him – you now are lifted from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from shame to honor. You are invited to the banqueting hall and, amazingly, you are given a place of honour at his feast.