

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Livestream Adult Bible Class
June 13, 2021
Esther 9:20-10:3

The Final Feast

The book of Esther began with a feast and ends with a feast! Indeed, almost all the major things that happen in the book happen at a feast. One can outline the whole book according to the feasts that occur throughout the story:

- A. The king's feast for the officials of the empire (1:2–4)
 - B. The king's feast for the men of Susa (1:5–8)
 - C. The feast celebrating Esther's rise (2:18)
 - D. Esther's first feast for the king and Haman (5:4–8)
 - D' Esther's second feast for the king and Haman (7:1–10)
 - C' The feast celebrating Mordecai's rise (8:17)
 - B' The feast of Purim for Susa (9:18)
 - A' The feast of Purim for the whole empire (9:17, 19)

It is also intriguing to note that the first edict given by the king states that men are the “rulers” of their households. This final proclamation of the book establishing the feast of Purim is not from the king, but from his queen, Esther. Things have come full circle!

Purim Established - Esther 9:20-32

The Feast of Purim is established through 2 decrees, one from Mordecai and another from the Queen. Mordecai spells out some of the details of the feast:

- To be celebrated on 14 and 15 of Adar
- Days of feasting and gladness
- Gifts of food
- Gifts to the poor
- “Purim” comes from the “pur” – the lots cast by Haman to determine the day Jews were to be killed.
- “These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants.” -- Esther 9:28

Queen Esther then these practices and a royal proclamation was sent to the 127 provinces of the empire. “The command of Queen Esther confirmed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.”

Purim Celebrated

What began in the empire of Xerxes continues to this day as a joyful feast to remember the salvation of the Jewish people long ago. Purim has become a celebration with 2 related themes:

- God's providence in bringing everything to its rightful conclusion. Esther is a story of everything looking hopeless, but being reversed by God's gracious but subtle providence. Evil may look like it is winning,

but God will have the final victory. The Hamans of the world may lay their wicked plans, but, in the end, God will turn those plans back on their heads.

- Exile -- Exile is the experience of disorder, displacement, and chaos. It is a time when nothing makes sense, when home is far away, when the world is not as it should be. Yet the message of Purim is that God is still in control. God is working behind the scenes, carrying out his providential plans. Knowing that enables us to remember that though things may look grim, we can still smile with the confidence that God is in control. We can even celebrate in the darkness, for there is the promise that God is bringing the light. Even when the world is chaotic and seems to be falling apart, there is the assurance that God is holding it together and bringing it to its rightful conclusion. In short, Purim is about meeting the pain of our exile with the celebration of God's care for us.

Traditions vary around the world but here are some of the more common practices in the celebration of Purim:

- Reading of the Esther scroll (in some groups Esther is read by a woman)
- Blotting out of Haman's name. As Esther is read, hearers make noise each of the 54 times Haman is referred to by name in the story.
- Giving of food and money to the poor. Each family gives two gifts of food and makes two offerings to charity.
- Purim meal and "festive drinking." Long ago one rabbi observed that one should drink until he could "no longer distinguish between 'Cursed Haman' and 'Blessed Mordecai.'
- Masquerading – to remember Esther's secret identity, Mordecai in sackcloth and Mordecai in the king's robes
- Hanging Haman (and his sons) in effigy
- Iranian Jews (descendants of the Jews of the Persian empire) visit the tomb of Esther and Mordecai

The Greatness of Mordecai - Esther 10:1-3

The book of Esther closes with a short chapter that details the honour given to Mordecai for his bravery and service to the king. He is exalted to become the second highest person in the kingdom, great among the Jews and popular with all.

In the 1930's archeologists uncovered thousands of clay tablets containing official records of the Persian empire. These cuneiform tablets mentioned a high ranking state official by the name of Marduka or Marduku, Babylonian for Mordecai, who served at Susa in the time of Xerxes. It is impossible to say whether these tablets are the "Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia" mentioned in Esther 10:2.

The only blemish on the otherwise happy ending to the story is that Xerxes appears to use this time of joy to institute new taxes on the Empire. There are two possible explanations for this. Perhaps he needed to recoup some of his losses as a result of the conflict or this is yet another indulgence to feed his own appetite for gain.

The Ongoing Feast

Even though the book of Esther makes no reference to God and even though the book is not quoted at all in the New Testament, we have noted along the way that it contains many themes that are very much a part of the Bible's story. This is also true of the final chapters.

Like the opening chapters of Esther, the book of Genesis details a "feast gone wrong" when Satan entices Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And as Esther closes with the institution of a great feast of celebration so also the final chapters of Revelation point us to the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom that has no end.

"Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." Revelation 19:9

Along the way to that final feast the Lord feeds us.

Though many examples could be shown, perhaps the one that speaks to our exile comes from Luke 24 as Jesus journeys with the Emmaus disciples on the evening of Easter Sunday.

Luke 24:13-35

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. **When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.** And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, **"The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.**

Like the Jews of Persia we celebrate the feast our Lord has given to us, a feast of salvation, love and victory and we feast upon Christ the Bread of Life who sustains us all the way to the heavenly banquet table. Amen.