

St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, Whiterocks

Dear St. Elizabeth's Family,

September 25, 2021

Who would have thought that a Jewish holiday celebrated hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus would have meaning for today's Native Christians? But one of the exciting things about reading the Bible is discovering an ancient story that still speaks to us powerfully. The Book of Esther not only does that, but it introduces us to a hero (and role model) who passed up a chance at riches and took a great personal risk to save the lives of her people.

Esther was just another beautiful, young woman in the court of King Ahasuerus of Persia, but she captured his fancy and became his queen. The king was so smitten that he would have given her anything, "even to the half of my kingdom." (*Esther 7:2*) But he was blind to what others saw more clearly: that Esther was not of Persian ancestry, but a Jew.

Haman, the king's vizier, or overseer, was keenly aware of this racial difference. He'd felt insulted by Mordecai, the Jewish scribe whose education gained him respect in the court. Haman was plotting a pogrom, or massacre, of the Jews in Persia, and he planned to begin by hanging Mordecai. He might have succeeded if Queen Esther hadn't intervened.

Despite the attachment the king had to her, a woman in that time had no political power. So when Esther saw the crisis brewing, she held a sumptuous banquet, inviting the king and his officers. The party was such a success that it continued for a second night, and as the wine was flowing, she took a calculated and potentially deadly risk.

When the king exuberantly offered her half of his kingdom, Esther modestly declined. "If I have won your favor, O king," she said, "let my life be given to me... and the lives of my people. For we are to be killed and annihilated." A hush fell over the crowd when she revealed her Jewish identity, and Esther bravely continued, "No enemy can compensate for this damage to the king."

Can you see the risk she was taking? A young woman, one among so many, publicly opposing the powerful overseer and claiming that the ethnic cleansing he was planning was a betrayal of the kingdom.

World history tells us the likely outcome of that confrontation. The grand vizier would triumph, with Esther and her people killed or sold into slavery. But almost miraculously, the king took Esther's side, the bad guy was hanged, and justice prevailed. Mordecai wrote to all the Jews of the kingdom, establishing a holiday known as Purim still celebrated today. He called for "days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor," in honor of the courage of Queen Esther.

If only American political leaders had listened to women like her, perhaps the Bear River massacre and Sand Creek and Wounded Knee could have been prevented. For now, the best the church can do is stand with Jews and Armenians and Dalits and Amazon Natives and all other oppressed people, insisting that God's will is for a world of justice and peace.

Michael+

Gathering in Our Hearts

Prayer for Grace

Lord God, Almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Passage Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22 (*in insert*)

from Psalm 51

Open my lips, O Lord,
and my mouth shall show forth your praise.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.
Give me the joy of your saving help again *
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

Reflection

I see more clearly, now that I am aging. Not with my eyesight, but with my soul. I see the fine detail of what I missed in younger years. I see the place of faith and forgiveness in my story. I see the possibilities of life in ways I never imagined. I was not blind in my youth, but my vision was limited to only a few seasons of seeing. Now I am an old man standing on a hill. I see more clearly. The universe stretches above me in infinite glory and the Earth spreads her shawl to wrap me in creation. Open the eyes of your spirit. Look out in wonder. See the fullness of the life you have received. See the promise of love walking in beauty before you.

Episcopal Bishop Steven Charleston, Choctaw nation

Remember those among us who are in need of prayer. We pray for rain, for safety from wildfires, and for the firefighters who protect us. In our church family, we remember Paul, Matthew, Kathy, Amanda, Julia, Tiarance, Chris, Tony, Leanna, Judy, Connie, Lyn, Sterling, Kaysen, Christopher, Eve, Logan, LeeRoy, Julia, Arick, Leo, Hudson, SueAnn, Redrock, Dave & Nora, Tyler, Rodricka, Ina Jane, Peggy and Reuban, and for those who have died, especially Jose Solis. We pray for first responders and medical workers, those from our reservation serving in the Armed Forces and for all veterans. We say the **Lord's Prayer** out loud.

Prayer for Young People

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

The Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

If you can, join us for in-person worship at St. Elizabeth's on Sundays at 10:00 am.

You can also look for prayers and a spiritual message on Michael Carney's Facebook page.

These short services are recorded every Sunday morning and can be viewed at any time.