

July 5, 2026

Esther 7:1-10; 9:1-2, 20-22, 29-32

Good morning! Thank you for allowing me to deliver this message to you today. As per my usual, I would like to disclose the use of the Working Preacher, Narrative Lectionary, and ChatGPT to create this discussion.

Our reading today comes from one of the most unusual books in the Bible.

If you noticed while listening, you may have realized something remarkable about the Book of Esther: God's name is never mentioned. Not once.

There are no miracles. There are no prophets proclaiming, "Thus says the Lord." There are no burning bushes or parted seas.

Instead, there is a young Jewish woman living far from home, an orphan who has become queen in a foreign empire, and a people facing destruction.

And somehow, even though God is never named, God's fingerprints seem to be everywhere.

The Book of Esther reminds us that sometimes God is working most powerfully in the places where we don't immediately see Him.

To understand today's reading, we need a little background.

Esther was a young Jewish woman raised by her cousin Mordecai after her parents died. She became queen of Persia, but she kept her Jewish identity a secret. Meanwhile, the king promoted a man named Haman, whose pride and hatred led him to devise a plan not only to kill Mordecai, but to destroy every Jewish person throughout the empire.

The king unknowingly signed the decree.

Imagine hearing that your family, your neighbors, your entire community had been condemned because of one man's hatred.

Mordecai urged Esther to speak to the king.

But there was one enormous problem.

Persian law said that no one—even the queen—could approach the king without being invited. Doing so could mean immediate execution.

Esther knew the risk.

She had not been summoned for thirty days. She had no guarantee the king would receive her.

She could have stayed silent.

From a human perspective, silence would have been understandable. She had already escaped poverty. She had become queen. She was safe—at least for the moment.

But Mordecai challenged her with words that have echoed through the centuries:

"Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this."

Notice what he did not say.

He did not tell Esther that she would certainly succeed.

He did not promise that everything would turn out well.

He simply invited her to consider that perhaps the place where she found herself was not an accident.

Perhaps God could use her.

That question reaches across the centuries and finds each one of us.

Perhaps where we are is not an accident either.

Perhaps the family we belong to, the work we do, the neighbors we have, the gifts we've been given—perhaps these are all places where God is quietly at work.

In Lutheran theology, we call that **vocation**.

Martin Luther taught that God doesn't only work through pastors or missionaries. God works through ordinary people living ordinary lives.

God works through farmers who feed the world.

God works through teachers who encourage struggling students.

God works through parents and grandparents who pass on faith around the kitchen table.

God works through healthcare workers who care for bodies and comfort frightened families.

God works through neighbors who shovel sidewalks, bring casseroles, or simply sit with someone who is grieving.

Most of us will never stand before a king.

But every one of us will have moments when our voice matters.

Today's reading is the moment when Esther finds her voice.

She doesn't storm into the palace demanding justice.

She prepares.

She prays.

She fasts.

She waits for the right moment.

Then she tells the truth.

She reveals that she herself is Jewish and that Haman's decree will condemn her along with her people.

It is an astonishing act of courage.

And I think it's important to remember that courage does not mean Esther wasn't afraid.

In fact, her famous words tell us exactly the opposite:

"If I perish, I perish."

She knew the cost.

Real courage isn't the absence of fear.

Real courage is deciding that love is greater than fear.

I wonder if that's where Esther speaks most clearly into our lives today.

Most of us are not asked to risk our lives.

But we are often asked to risk our comfort.

Sometimes courage looks like speaking up for someone everyone else ignores.

Sometimes it looks like telling the truth when it would be easier to stay quiet.

Sometimes it means admitting we've made a mistake.

Sometimes it means standing beside someone who is lonely, grieving, or excluded.

I'd like to share one place where this story has spoken to me personally.

As many of you know, I work as a nurse practitioner. Throughout my career, there have been moments when I have had to find the courage to speak up on behalf of a patient—

especially those who were too sick, too frightened, too overwhelmed, or simply didn't have the medical knowledge to advocate for themselves.

Those conversations aren't always easy.

Sometimes they mean questioning a plan of care.

Sometimes they mean asking a physician to look at something one more time because something just doesn't seem right.

Sometimes they mean challenging an administrative decision because I believe it isn't in the best interest of a patient.

I can tell you that speaking up to people with more authority is not always comfortable. There is always that little voice inside that wonders, "What if I'm wrong?" or "What if this isn't received well?"

But then I think about the patient.

They are trusting all of us to care for them.

If I remain silent simply because the conversation feels uncomfortable, who is speaking for them?

Thankfully, I have also been blessed to work alongside many physicians, nurses, and leaders who welcome those conversations because they share the same goal—to provide the very best care for the people entrusted to us.

That has helped me realize something important.

Advocacy isn't about winning an argument.

It is about loving your neighbor enough to use the voice God has given you.

Sometimes it means forgiving someone when every part of us wants to hold on to resentment.

Those moments rarely make the news.

But they shape the Kingdom of God.

And perhaps that is another lesson Esther teaches us.

God often works through what seems ordinary.

A conversation.

A meal.

A kind word.

A difficult phone call.

A decision to show up.

A willingness to say, "I'm with you."

In today's reading, the Jewish people are delivered, and later they establish the festival of Purim—not simply to celebrate survival, but to remember God's faithfulness.

That is something we Christians understand deeply.

Every Sunday is, in a way, an act of remembering.

We remember God's faithfulness in Christ.

We remember that death did not have the final word.

We remember that love proved stronger than fear.

We remember that Christ Himself entered danger, not to protect Himself, but to save others.

And because of that, we are free.

Free not to cling to our own security.

Free to love our neighbors.

Free to serve.

Free to speak.

Free to forgive.

That freedom is one of the great gifts of the Gospel.

We don't have to earn God's love by being brave enough.

God already loves us in Christ.

And because we are secure in that love, we are set free to act courageously for the sake of others.

As I prepared this reflection, I kept returning to one question that Esther leaves with us.

It isn't, "Would I be brave enough to stand before a king?"

It's much simpler.

Where has God placed me today where my voice, my presence, or my kindness could make a difference for someone else?

Maybe it's in your family.

Maybe it's with a neighbor.

Maybe it's at the coffee shop, the elevator, the feed store, the school board meeting, the nursing home, or the doctor's office.

Maybe someone needs encouragement.

Maybe someone needs an advocate.

Maybe someone simply needs to know they are seen.

Like Esther, we may never fully understand why we've been placed where we are.

But we can trust that God is already there, quietly working through ordinary people with willing hearts.

I've learned that in healthcare, there is almost always someone in the room with the most authority. But there is also someone in the room who is the most vulnerable. Esther reminds us that God often calls the person with a voice to use it on behalf of the one who doesn't have one.

The same is true far beyond the hospital. It is true in our families, in our schools, in our workplaces, in our communities, and here in our church.

We may never stand before a king. But every day we stand before opportunities to love our neighbor with courage.

And thanks be to God, we do not do so alone. The God whose name is never spoken in Esther is the same God who promises in Christ, 'I am with you always.' That promise gives us the freedom to speak, to serve, to love, and to trust that God is already at work—even when we cannot yet see the outcome.

Amen