

The story of Esther is an exciting, fast-paced, good versus evil kind of story that unfolded on a national scale. Exciting whether you read it or watch the movie. It occurred about 500 years before Jesus was born.

It is the interplay of five main characters...the foolish inept King Xerxes, the brave and beautiful Esther, the wise upright father-figure Mordecai, and the evil wicked bad Haman, the King's second in command.

And the fifth "character", if you will, includes ALL of the Jews living at that time, living in the king's vast kingdom spanning from India to Ethiopia.

This book of the Bible explores some darker themes: racial hatred, misogyny – hatred and objectifying of women, the threat of genocide (intentionally killing a whole ethnic group), idolatry, and the evil of overweening pride and vanity. Creating a juicy enjoyable tale!

Good triumphs and all ends happily, sort of. 75,000 enemies of the Jews are killed in one day in a grand ironic reversal of fortune, including Haman and his 10 sons. So, there's that.

But all in all, the witness of God's faithfulness to his people and the power of one person being faithful to God. A book in the Bible in which God is not mentioned even once.

A story that focuses on the difference the actions of one person can make.

Where we get the pretty well-known phrase from chapter 4 verse 14...**”For such a time as this”**. The passage where Mordecai was encouraging Esther to take a risk that could end her life, to approach the king, and try to save her people; to save all the Jews from certain death.

He says to Esther, **“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”**

This is an intriguing idea. This idea that God has placed and positioned each one of us in places intentionally. That right where we are, just as we are, we can be positive agents of change, heroes of the faith for God.

Whether that is on a big scale or little scale, or somewhere in between.

Speaking of little scale, I was doing some of my own pondering, **“Where in my life have I been perfectly positioned to be a positive agent for change?”**

One sunny morning driving to work about 8 or 10 years ago, nice drive, when I all of a sudden came upon a dip in the road, hiding a LARGE metal ladder. No time to think or react. I just drove over it.

To be clear, it was parallel NOT perpendicular to the dotted lines/lines on the road, middle of the lane, no other option but to drive over it. But that was lucky. It could have been much worse!

And I had a decision to make. Do I keep driving or do I pull over, do a u-turn and move that ladder off the road? The danger of allowing it to remain was unmistakable.

So, I drove back and before I could even lift it/begin to drag it off the road...God's help arrived. A truck with a ladder rack.

I had to ask..."Is this your ladder?!" And he said, "Nope!" So, then I asked, "Would you like a new ladder?"

And in less than 30 seconds we had the road cleared up, danger avoided, civic duty performed. For such a time as this.

Over the years, two different times, came across a couple of cows that have gotten loose. Needed to let the farmer know and get them back home. Didn't want the cow to get hurt or killed or any damage to on-coming cars or harm to their passengers.

And then just recently, I felt I was in the right time and place, the right person to help a woman who had been experiencing crushing stress in her workplace.

She needed a safe person to unload on. And I was available. I even sensed God helping me listen. For such a time as this.

In those situations, I did feel like I was the right person, at the right time and place, even sensed God helping me take action! So, it doesn't have to be on a national scale to be real and of God.

But those times, even if small, still might be a time in which we are stretched a little bit. We might feel a little

awkward or uncomfortable, a situation that kind of pushes us out of our comfort zone or out of our sense of comfy routine.

There are times when we are faced with options that says, **“I know God is bigger than this. I know God has said that all things are possible to those who believe. I know God is a God of miracles and provision.**

**But, but, but...it’s so cozy and comfortable where I am right now.”**

Oh...I love my routines. Of all the things I let go of in moving...I miss my routines the most. Transitions can be hard...everything is new! But I am rebuilding my routines.

I have my old cozy comfortable slippers. And I have only left for work twice while wearing them.

One of my favorite routines! I have two cups of loose-leaf Market Spice Cinnamon Orange tea. Each and every morning.

A creature of habit and routine.

Those invisible, warm, safe, secure practices we surround ourselves with. We all do it, to one degree or another.

When we get used to something or someone, or when we do something in a particular way at the same time each day. Or when we just don’t want something/anything to change.

That’s when we could say we are right in the middle of our comfort zones.

But sometimes God calls us to move out of our comfort zones. Because where our comfort zones end...our growth zone

begins. Like in our story of Esther today. God calls Esther to move out of her comfort zone. Here's the story.

The Jews are recovering from their time in exile in Babylon. Having been radically pulled out of their comfort zones. They are trying to regroup, become reorientated to God, and re-establish their faith practices.

That might sound familiar to us post Pandemic.

The story begins with a king who had partied way too much for a whole week. At the end of that week, completely drunk, King Xerxes calls upon his eunuchs to bring forth his beautiful Queen Vashti.

Resplendent in her crown and gown. He wanted to show off her beauty to his guests.

Long story short, not at all doing Vashti's courage justice. But she refused to come and be paraded in front of a large group of drunk men. Way to go, Vashti!

In a fit of rage, the king establishes a royal decree, banning Vashti forever from his presence and initiating a beauty pageant of sorts to replace her.

And all throughout his vast kingdom, officials were appointed to bring all the beautiful virgins before the king. So that he might pick a younger more beautiful new wife.

At that same time, there was a faithful God-honoring Jew named Mordecai. Living and working in the King's palace. He adopted and raised his young cousin, a girl named Hadassah, after her parents died. We know her as Esther.

The beauty pageant is under way, as a multitude of virgins are being brought to the palace, Haman enters this drama. He is promoted by the King to be his second in command. And the King commanded everyone to bow down and kneel to honor Haman when he came by.

But Mordecai refused.

Mordecai's refusal was brought to Haman's attention along with Mordecai's faith and nationality of being a Jew. Haman pride had no limits. He hated to waste his fury on just one Jew. So, he began plotting to eliminate all the Jewish people.

He approaches the King saying, **“There is an odd sect of people scattered throughout your Kingdom who don't fit in. Their customs and ways are different. They disgrace the King's laws. They are an affront. If it pleases the King, I will pay 375 tons of silver to help finance letting them all be destroyed!”**

And the King agreed. The 13<sup>th</sup> day of a certain month was set for the Jews' destruction and officials were notified all throughout the Kingdom.

And then King and Haman share a beer, well, a drink of some kind, celebrating their hard work.

Meanwhile, Esther, keeping her Jewish nationality and faith a secret from the palace officials and King, gains the attention of the main overseer.

He helps her win the affection of the King. Long story short, the King fell in love with her. Esther wins that beauty pageant. And she is named the new queen!

Mordecai finds out about the date being set for the Jews destruction, and sends word to the new queen saying, **“Don’t think that just because you live in the King’s house you’re the one Jew who will get out of this alive.**

**If you persist in staying silent at a time like this, help and deliverance will arrive for the Jews from someplace else; but you and your family will be wiped out. Who knows? Maybe you were made queen for just such a time as this.”**

Esther knows coming into the King’s presence without a royal invitation means a death sentence. So, she asks for Mordecai and the Jews to fast and pray for a favorable outcome.

She risks her life, approaches the King without permission. The King sees her approaching and allowed her to come to him, where she invites the King to a special dinner.

At that dinner, good food and plenty of wine, and her beauty...scripture says the King was ready to give her anything up to half his Kingdom. Haman had been invited too. Timing it just right, Esther pleads for her people’s deliverance.

The King is somehow outraged that a decree like this had been issued. Inept. Asks who is behind it all and Esther points to Haman.

The death decree is stopped, Haman is executed, and Mordecai takes his place of authority! And they all lived

happily ever after...except those 75,000 who planned on killing the Jews, who themselves were put down by the sword. Still pretty violent.

The Jews are saved.

Because of Esther's risky appeal to the King. She is used by God to save her people. She stepped out of her comfort zone, took a huge risk and God proved himself faithful.

Esther is our hero this morning!

If one person can be used by God to save the Jewish nation; what might God do with four or five or eight people...here at Buffalo UMC?

What good could be unleashed if a handful of willing people were to invest and take risks, to step out of their comfort zones.

Imagine what God could do in our midst!

For such a time as this.

### **Time of reflection:**

Another way to engage with our Heroes of the Faith series and with Esther in particular...is to think about your own personal heroes of the faith.

Esther had Mordecai, who influenced her to grow in her faith in God.

Who in your life has encouraged you to step out of your comfort zone? Did they encourage you to begin serving at church or



take on a leadership role, begin to give financially or increase your giving, or become a prayer warrior for our future here?