

“For Such a Time as This”

Esther 4.10–17

The Rev. Hal Chorpensing, Plymouth Cong'l UCC, 1 October 2006

Have you ever been in a situation – *a bad situation* – and told yourself, “If I only wait a little while, things will get better”? Most of us have. And sometimes just waiting it out is the right thing to do; sometime things rectify themselves and we can move forward. And other times, waiting only makes things worse.

For instance, if you put off seeing the doctor because you have these little twinges of chest pain every now and again...that’s not a good idea. Or if you have a friend or family member with a substance-abuse problem and you decide that it might go away if you just ignore it...also not a great idea.

But, if you are able to zip your lip when someone is giving you an earful...just unloading their frustration and anger... especially if that person is (or is acting like) an adolescent...that can be a good thing. Succinctly put, sometimes it’s best to shut up. Mark Twain reputedly said, “I’d rather be quiet and someone think me a fool than open my mouth and prove it.” And the book of Proverbs records that “Even fools who keep silent are considered wise; when they close their lips, they are deemed intelligent.”¹

One of the wisest prayers I know was penned in 1943 by Reinhold Niebuhr – one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century, and an ordained UCC minister. Many of you know a version of it by heart, but if you want to see its words, it’s number 852 in the back of our hymnal.

“God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.”

Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs around the world use Niebuhr’s Serenity Prayer, though it has been amended slightly from the original.

So, the decision to accept things as they are (to keep silent) or whether to change things (and take action) requires wisdom. And Niebuhr’s prayer concludes by asking for divine wisdom.



Esther was a woman in a tough situation. She was a Jew living among Persians – in Iran. In fact, she wasn’t just a resident, was in the court of the king, a fellow named Ahasueris (also known as Xerxes I). In fact, she was the queen, having replaced Vashti. In spite of her elevated status, Esther’s position was precarious. If she ventured to tell the king what his evil underling Haman was plotting, it could cost her her life. But if she kept silent, all the Jews living under Ahasueris (not just in Persia, but in its territories from India to Ethiopia) would be killed as part of Haman’s evil plot.

Esther hesitates, because this is a risky situation. Maybe if she just waited a little while, things would blow over. Or perhaps, as her guardian Mordecai suggests, if she balks, help will come from somewhere else for the Jews...and she and her family will perish anyway. But maybe...just maybe...the reason Esther was elevated to the royal family of Persia is that she is in the right place at the right time. She is the woman of the hour; it is her moment to shine.

It is a critical moment in history. Annihilation and injustice hang heavy in the air. “If you keep silence *at such a time as this*,” Mordecai warns Esther, “you...will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just *such a time as this*...”

¹ Prov. 17.28

This is a decisive moment. It's a watershed moment for the Jews living under Ahasueris...and for Mordecai...and for Esther. (*It's a cliffhanger in the story line, and if you don't know how it ends, I won't give it away. The whole book is only about eight pages long, so give it a read!*)



How do we tell when we've come to a decisive moment? How do we understand when we've been called to do something to "change the things we can?" The story of Esther provides an example:

First, is there an opportunity to prevent or to change an injustice? To be an instrument of God's intention for humankind? There are so many situations that demand our attention, it's easy to get overwhelmed, so we need to prioritize. And we can't get distracted by things that don't matter...like whether Fort Collins should allow a hookah bar. (*Have you ever noticed that virtually every newspaper has a daily Sports section, but education and religion are lucky to get a weekly page or two? It's just more bread and circuses to keep the populace complacent, fat, and happy.*)

Second, do you have the ability to affect or influence what is going on? If you're a parent, you have a lot of influence over your children: whether and what they watch on TV or their PlayStation2, who they hang out with, and what they do after school. If you're a citizen, you have a influence on your elected officials, not to mention the rights of petition and protest. And if you're a person of faith, don't forget the power of prayer.

Third, do you have the courage to stand up and be counted? Last Sunday, some of us heard John Henry Peck tell the sad story of his successor at a church in Cairo, a Canadian missionary, who was likely killed because of his faith. It takes courage to take a stand, whether it is about your faith, about peace in the face of those who agitate for war, or truth among those who perpetuate falsity.



Is our world so different from the one in which Esther lived? Are there still despots like Ahasueris and henchmen like Haman running around? Maybe they have different names, but somehow the characters seem still to be with us.

Think about the three points of Esther's action: *a situation, influence, and courage*. And think about Niebuhr's prayer for *acceptance, change, and wisdom*.

It's World Communion Sunday. So, I would invite you to pray for wisdom about what we can and should do for God's world: God's planet and God's people.

When you think of problems affecting the world, *marriage may not be at the top of your list*. Perhaps it's global warming. It could be conflict resolution on a local or global level. Or education in the developing world. Maybe it's poverty here in the United States. These are only a few situations. Do you have influence? Do you have courage?

Think about what is happening in southern Lebanon, in Darfur, in Iraq, in Iran. They sound so far away. Think how each of us is tied to them not only by what our nation is doing in its foreign policy, but also that they are populated not by Muslims, Jews, or Christians, but by persons who worship the same God we do. And even if they worshipped no god at all, we share a common planet and a common future. How can we influence justice and shalom? Do we have the courage?

Last evening, several hundred people – including over 20 folks from Plymouth – gathered to honor Bob Geller's 85th birthday and to raise funds for the Geller Center for Spiritual Development at CSU, which many of you know as United Campus Ministries. Bob is a person who has had an impact on many lives over the years. He looked for opportunities, found ways to be influential, and then had the courage to move forward,

whether it was founding numerous organizations both on campus and in the community, or in taking stands for justice that often ran counter to the prevailing views of the community.

There are so many ways we can help, and rather than simply throwing our hands up as if to say, “I don’t have time. I can’t change things anyway. And I don’t want to commit myself,” perhaps we need to remember that we are a people with tremendous influence. We are Americans, the world’s sole superpower. And as its citizens, we, like Esther, have the ear of the king. Perhaps you and I are here right now for a reason. “Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just *such a time as this...*” Amen.