

Esther 4 - For such a time as this  
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Most of us have dreamed at one point or another in our lives of doing something really special.  
I'm not talking about a special holiday or a special experience. I mean achieving something special.  
Maybe there's a reason that God put me on this earth. Maybe there's something that I can do that is a job just for me.  
No one else's job but a unique contribution that I can make. Now the practical person hears that kind of dreaming and responds, "Of course there's a job just for you. No one else can be a father to your 5 children. No one else can be a husband to Cherida. No one else is tasked with being a minister at Holy Trinity, not this year at least."  
And of course that's true. The same is true for you. God has put you in the network of relationships that you have. And only you can be the person God has made you to be in that situation.  
Maybe it's watching the Olympics that does it to me, but sometimes I dream about more. I dream about making a difference in something significant not just to my family or my church, but making a difference in the course of history. Have you ever dreamed about changing the course of history?

Maybe it's pride. Maybe I should be content to be faithful in the place God has put me. Maybe I need to realise that if you want to achieve like an Olympic athlete, you need to train as hard as an Olympic athlete. Not many of us would be prepared

to put in the work that Ariarne Titmus has put in.  
But for some people,  
their moment to change history just comes upon them.  
They don't get much of an opportunity to train.  
They just need grasp the moment when God puts it in front of them.  
Esther was one of those.  
And in our reading today, Esther makes the transformation:  
from beauty queen to saint;  
from trophy wife to intercessor;  
from passive victim to national saviour.  
Esther begins the path to changing history.  
This is God's moment for her.

Our story picks up  
after Haman has published his edict across the whole empire.  
The whole empire has been invited  
to join in wiping out the Jews on the 13th day of Adar.  
Would people join in  
wiping out their neighbours who had done nothing to them?  
Yes unfortunately many would.  
Because the edict said that when you wipe them out,  
you are welcome to take their stuff.  
Greed will make sure of it.  
The Jews were facing total wipe-out.  
When Mordecai heard about it,  
he was overcome by grief.  
4:1 "He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes,  
and went into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly."  
It's not the way we would respond to dreadful news.  
But we get the picture.  
He was devastated and in true Middle Eastern style,  
he was letting the world know exactly how he felt about it.  
And he wasn't alone.  
That's how Jews right across the empire  
were reacting to the terrible news.

There was one Jew who was blissfully ignorant.  
Esther was ensconced in the royal harem.  
It wasn't the job of the ladies of the harem  
to worry about what was happening in the world.  
It was their job to be available for the king's pleasure.  
So Esther knew nothing.  
The first she knew that something might be up,  
was when her attendants told her  
that Mordecai was looking dishevelled at the city gates.  
She was upset that this man  
who had brought her up like a daughter was clearly in a bad place.  
But she didn't know what was wrong.  
She had some clothes sent to him.  
But someone who tears their clothes in mourning  
is not looking for new clothes.  
And he wouldn't take the clothes.  
So Esther sent an attendant to find out what was wrong.  
And Mordecai told the attendant the whole story.  
He gave the attendant Haman's edict  
ordering the annihilation of the Jews.  
But Mordecai didn't just tell her the problem.  
He told Esther that she needed to go in and see the king  
and "beg for mercy and plead with him for her people".  
Which sounds like a very reasonable plan.  
Until we find out that no one could go in and see the king  
unless they were summoned.  
Remember Esther's marriage to Xerxes  
was not a marriage as we understand them.  
Esther is 21 years old or thereabouts by this time.  
Xerxes is 44 years old.  
Esther is different from the other women in Xerxes' harem  
because he has married her.  
That means children to Esther will be heirs to the throne.  
But it does not mean that Xerxes  
got rid of the other women in his harem.

It's not like he said,  
"I'm a married man now.  
I don't need a harem anymore."  
Far from it.  
Esther hadn't been summoned into his presence for a month.  
She had no idea  
how she would be received if she went to see the king unsummoned.  
But she knew what the law was,  
if she went without being summoned,  
then if Xerxes chose to,  
he could have her put to death.  
And he has form  
when it comes to disposing of wives who displeased him.  
What Mordecai was instructing Esther to do was incredibly risky.  
And Esther sent Mordecai a message to tell him so.

Mordecai's reply to Esther are key words in this book.  
Mordecai is a main character in the story.  
But these words are the only words he speaks in the entire book.  
That serves to focus our attention on them.  
"Do not think that because you are in the king's house  
you alone of all the Jews will escape.  
For if you remain silent at this time,  
relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place,  
but you and all your father's family will perish.  
And who knows but that you have come to your royal position  
for such a time as this."  
First of all, he puts the choice that Esther faces into perspective.  
It's not that Esther has the choice between risking her life  
and enjoying life in the royal harem.  
She too is a Jew.  
If the Jews get massacred, she will be treated the same as others.  
Her ethnicity will be exposed.  
Esther's choice is between risking her life now  
and forfeiting her life later.

Well that puts things into perspective.  
And then Mordecai puts out a statement of his faith in God.  
'For if you remain silent at this time,  
relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place.'  
Now as we've mentioned numerous times,  
the name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther.  
But there's no question  
where Mordecai thinks relief and deliverance are going to come from.  
He's not putting his trust in the universe.  
Why should the universe  
look more favourably on the Jews than the Amalekites?  
He's not saying in an optimistic Australian fashion,  
"Something will turn up, it always does."  
Mordecai's faith is in the promises of God.  
God has promised his people a Messiah in the line of David.  
Ex 6:7 God has promised his people  
that he will take them as his own people and he will be their God.  
Mordecai knows that God keeps his promises.  
And so he knows that God's people cannot be wiped out,  
whatever Haman has written in an edict.  
Mordecai also knows  
that just because God has put you in a place  
to bring his promises to fulfilment  
doesn't mean that it's impossible to drop the ball.  
The Israelites were in a position to go into the promised land.  
But one generation dropped the ball.  
And the nation had to wander in the desert for 40 years  
before the next generation took possession of the land.  
Esther might have been put in a position  
to be God's woman in the situation,  
but she had to seize the opportunity.  
If Esther dropped the ball,  
God's promises were not going to fail.  
Nothing takes God by surprise.  
He will bring his promises to fulfilment.

But the consequences for Esther of failing to seize the day  
would be as stark  
as the consequences for the Israelites in the wilderness.  
Well that's a big ask for a young woman.  
Unlike the Olympic athletes,  
she hasn't been training for this moment for years on end.  
One minute she's in the king's harem,  
with no idea that anything is amiss in the world.  
With no training in diplomacy or the law.  
The next minute  
she's being called upon to save her people from annihilation.  
It's enough to make you take a deep breath.  
In fact, it's enough to make you totally freak out.  
Except for one very important consideration.  
"And who knows but that you have come to your royal position  
for such a time as this?"  
It might seem like you are underprepared.  
It might seem like the task ahead seems dangerous,  
perhaps even hopeless.  
But if God has raised you up for this very purpose,  
then he can give you whatever it takes.  
You just have to trust him.

The question for you is,  
have you been raised up by God for such a time as this?  
Are you like Esther?  
And the answer to that question is undoubtedly yes.  
You have been raised up by God for such a time as this.  
Because if God had wanted you in another time or another place,  
he would have put you there.  
Now of course being raised up for such a time as this  
may not mean that you will change the course of history like Esther.  
Your contribution, my contribution, may be more modest.  
As I said at the start of the sermon,  
I'm a husband, a father, and a minister.

You could add to that, a son, a friend.  
What God has for me to do in those relationships  
might not be earth shattering.  
But he has put me here for a reason,  
and I need to take his providence seriously.  
What does God want from me in this situation?  
It's something.  
It's not nothing.  
He's not sitting in heaven saying,  
"I'm concerned about Esther and the important people,  
Tim can just fumble along."  
No God has raised up each one of us for such a time as this.  
Now the point of telling you that  
is not so that you can spend your life wondering  
"I wonder what it is that God has raised me up for".  
That's pretty pointless.  
Partly because it's pretty straightforward most of the time  
what God has raised you up for.  
I look down at the ring on my finger.  
That tells me what God has raised me up for.  
I wander out my back door and see the building across the car park.  
That tells me what God has raised me up for.  
And if there is something a bit out of the box  
like there was for Esther.  
God doesn't usually make it hard to work out.  
Esther got a pretty clear message from Mordecai.  
And you will have people tap you on the shoulder.  
"Don't you think that God could use you to x, y or z?"  
The point of telling you  
that God has raised you up for such a time as this,  
is so that you can be purposeful about your life.  
Lots of us just drift through life.  
We meander along in our laid back Australian fashion.  
So long as life chugs along reasonably uneventfully,  
we're quite content.

But God has put you here for such a time as this.  
He has a purpose for you.  
So live like you have a purpose!

Well the chapter has the only words in the book from Mordecai.  
It also has some key words from Esther.

4:16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me.  
Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day.

I and my attendants will fast as you do.

When this is done,

I will go to the king, even though it is against the law.

And if I perish, I perish."

They are inspiring and courageous words.

First of all, she puts the venture into God's hands.

She doesn't mention prayer.

But fasting and prayer are hand and glove in the Old Testament.

Daniel fasted before the great prayer of Daniel 9.

The Ninevites in Jonah fasted and prayed as they repented.

I'm sure Esther and the Jews prayed fervently

as they fasted for three days.

It's about giving the success of the mission she's undertaking  
into God's hands.

In the end, Esther has absolutely no control  
over how King Xerxes receives her.

He might extend the sceptre to her and tell her she is welcome.

He might also decide that her appearing unrequested is disrespectful  
and banish her or worse.

And apart from the relationship that she has developed with Xerxes  
over the five years of their marriage,

Esther doesn't have any control over the situation.

But God does.

And Esther knows that.

So she intercedes before God,

and she has all the Jews in the city intercede as well.

Which is only fair enough because it's on their behalf as well as her own



that she is putting her life in Xerxes hands.

But notice her crucial words at the end.

"If I perish, I perish."

She spends three days fasting and praying.

She has the people of God fasting and praying for her.

And she after all that, she still acknowledges the possibility of failure.

It's not a lack of faith.

Many Christians today would accuse you of lacking faith

if you acknowledge the possibility of failure

when you are doing something to serve God,

when you have prayed long and hard about it.

But it's not a lack of faith.

It's simply an acknowledgement that God is sovereign.

It may not be his will for us to succeed.

He doesn't need us to succeed to bring his plans to fruition.

Sometimes you can do all the right things.

You can want to do something really good for God.

You can be steadfast and diligent in prayer about it.

And you can still fail.

That's not a sign of God's displeasure.

It might just be a sign that he's got other plans.

Now you might be like me.

I really dislike failure.

It might upset you to know that sometimes God plans for us to fail.

Even when we do things right.

But you know, your character grows more through failure than success.

Failure teaches humility and perseverance.

Failure makes it easier for you to accept others in their weakness.

So we need to learn from Esther's attitude here.

She's not just talking about failure,

she's talking about death.

And she's accepting that her death might be God's plan.

"If I perish, I perish."

Those are challenging and inspiring words.

Esther is willing to lay down her life for her people.  
In that way, she is like the Lord Jesus.  
Of course Jesus actually laid down his life.  
Esther only expressed her willingness to.  
But she is nevertheless like Jesus  
in her willingness to lay down her life for God's people.  
Jesus said, Jn15:13, "Greater love has no one than this:  
to lay down one's life for one's friends."  
So in this passage, Esther is showing great love.  
She's living out a life of willingness to lay down her life for her friends.

You know the pandemic we are currently experiencing  
is not the first in human history.  
You've probably heard about the Black Death.  
Even before that, there was a terrible pandemic in the 4th century.  
We don't know what the sickness was  
because medical science was practically nonexistent in the 4th century.  
But it was terrible.  
People were dying left, right and centre.  
And it was right through the Roman Empire, from England to Egypt.  
And likely much further,  
we just don't have great historical records from other places.  
Medical science was close to nonexistent  
but people had worked out one thing.  
You caught this disease by being in contact with other people.  
So if you wanted to stay alive,  
in today's terms, what did you do?  
You social distanced.  
How did you do that?  
If a member of your household got sick,  
you dragged them on their sleeping mat  
out on the street and left them to die.  
And how did the Christian Church respond to this in the 4th century?  
Many Christians took the sick who were left to die,  
and tended to them.

They knew that by doing so,  
they were seriously risking their own lives.  
But in the words of Esther,  
"If I perish, I perish."

In his commentary on Esther,  
Peter Adam puts together the words of Mordecai  
and the words of Esther.  
He combines them in a Christian motto to live by.  
"For such a time as this, I am willing to lay down my life."  
"For such a time as this, I am willing to lay down my life."  
That's where Esther was.  
That's the great example of the Lord Jesus.  
That's what the Christians in the 4th century did.

And so it leaves a very clear question for you.  
You know that God has put you here for such a time as this.  
If he'd wanted you in another time or place,  
he would have put you there.  
But he's put you here, today, in such a time as this.  
So in such a time as this, are you willing to lay down your life?  
Are you willing to love God's people sacrificially like Esther did?  
Do you trust God enough to put your life into his hands,  
and accept that he might have you fail?

Let's pray that the answer for us would be a resounding 'Yes'.