

You Are Brave
Esther 4 (selected verses) and Luke 19:29-40
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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"Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for such a time as this." Mordecai said those words to Esther.

It was a bumpy road that had gotten her there. The king, disgraced when Queen Vashti chose to stand up to him and to say no when he wanted to parade her before his drunken friends, that king had found a new queen. He had called together beautiful young women from across the kingdom and from all of them he had noticed Esther.

Now Esther was queen. But let us not pretend that gave her much power. Not only did she live in the shadow of a queen who had been dismissed but she could not even approach the king without first being invited.

And yet, here she was living with the suggestion that she needed to ask for an audience with the king, that it was up to *her* to defend her people.

After all, Haman, the king's evil sidekick, had convinced the king to sign a decree calling for the destruction of all the Jews in the kingdom. Haman's insecurity had gotten the best of him, and when one Jewish person refused to bow to him, he set his sites on them all. Yes, that was what had motivated this decree - Haman's ego was bruised when Mordecai refused to bow.

So now, the king had committed to the destruction of the Jews. And the queen, who was Jewish - though most people didn't realize it - had a decision to make.

As Mordecai, her relative, pointed out, her crown would not keep her safe. Meanwhile, he also believed that if she didn't step up in defense of her people, someone else would. **Someone always steps up when the world has gone awry.**

So with the community fasting and holding her in prayer, Esther weighed her options. Admittedly it was frightening, the thought of going before the king without an invitation, the reality that such a request could be her destruction. And, meanwhile, she knew what she had to do. "If I perish, I perish," she said. And she set out to see the king.

Some hundreds of years later, under a different power, Jesus of Nazareth was born. Throughout his life Jesus was guided by the heart of God. He was guided by a commitment to love, to compassion, to justice. He was guided by a commitment to value all people, to heal those who were hurting, to set the oppressed free. And all of that meant, time and time again, standing up to the powers that be, standing up to the empire, standing up to the ways of worldly regimes.

Today is the day we call Palm Sunday. It is a day we celebrate. Most often when we picture it, we picture it like a community parade. Crowds with palms in their hands, Jesus waving to his adoring fans from the back of a colt. We picture it in such a manner that we might not be surprised if he reached in his pack and tossed out a handful of candy.

And while there is some truth in this image, after all scripture tells us that people gathered and that they were shouting and celebrating who Jesus was; while it is a moment in the Jesus story where we start to feel hopeful and think that maybe, just maybe the ways of our loving God are going to prevail...while all of that is true, there is another reality to this scene.

So, let's hear this familiar story again:

When [Jesus] had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' " So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

*"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"*

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." (Luke 19:29-40, NRSVUE).

We tend to want to simply see the Palm Sunday story as a celebration but, not unlike Esther, Jesus came to this moment with the knowledge that risk was involved. Jesus entered Jerusalem, against the counsel of some, knowing that the egos of those in power were fragile and his presence would not be welcome by all. He rode into Jerusalem, a picture of humility compared to the ego-driven entries of the earthly kings. He allowed people to shout out about his saving presence when the powers that be would have preferred to silence them. And Jesus, like Mordecai, knew that even if these were silenced, the way of justice and love would find its voice. **Someone always steps up when the world has gone awry.**

And in our world today we are reminded again that it is not just the great people of the Bible who are called to be brave. It was not just hundreds and thousands of years ago that the world needed people to take risks on behalf of humanity. Rather, we, too, are called to choose courage and to stand on behalf of God and God's people.

Whenever we do a baptism we ask three questions. One is a question particular to Christianity - it is a question of belief, of understanding, a question about who Jesus is.

One is a question of community - a question about wanting to live out our faith together with this community.

The third is a question of courage and commitment.

This is what we ask: Do you covenant to turn away from injustice and everything that would separate you from God and do you turn toward God, the source of love, and to Jesus as a guide for how God would have you live, loving and serving your neighbor?

This question is important. It isn't just a question of personal behavior and turning away from things that interfere in our own ability to follow God. Rather it is a question of choosing the way of God's justice over the ways of the injustices of the world. It is a question of choosing the way of God's love and compassion, not just in our personal lives, but in how we interact with all of our neighbors.

If we really listen to this question, it is a question of courage. It is a question that asks us to decide if we will be the voices that shout out, the people who stand up, the ones who refuse to let injustice have the day. It is a question, in the face of the claim of Mordecai and the claim of Jesus, the claim that **someone always stands up when the world goes awry**...it is a question that asks if that someone will be us.

Friends, we live in a world that is hurting. We live in a world where so many people need other people to stand up and to speak out on their behalf. We live in a world where injustices are trying to have the day.

But we know the heart of God. We live in the shadow of Esther who risked herself for others. We follow Jesus who refused to stand down even at the cost of his life.

There is risk involved. The way of Jesus is not easy. And we are created to be brave.

In the song "For Such a Time as This," Marty and Misha Goetz write:
"Who am I that I should find myself, right here, right now?
Who am I to try to save these lives, someday, somehow?"

"For such a time as this, for such a time as this.
Are you our hands, are you our hope at such a time as this?
Is there before you now a chance you dare not miss?
Could it be you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" [For Such a Time as This \(Esther's Song\) | Marty Goetz & Misha Official Live Music Video](#)

Friends, we may not feel it every day, but we are brave. And we are invited, in that courage, to stand, to risk, to love for such a time as this. Amen.