

9 August 2020, 11am  
*Christ Church New  
Southgate & Friern Barnet*  
Rev. Ruth Moriarty

*Reading: Esther 4.12-17*

<sup>12</sup> When Mordecai received Esther's message, <sup>13</sup> he sent her this warning: "Don't imagine that you are safer than any other Jew just because you are in the royal palace. <sup>14</sup> If you keep quiet at a time like this, help will come from heaven to the Jews, and they will be saved, but you will die and your father's family will come to an end. Yet who knows—maybe it was for a time like this that you were made queen!"

<sup>15</sup> Esther sent Mordecai this reply: <sup>16</sup> "Go and get all the Jews in Susa together; hold a fast and pray for me. Don't eat or drink anything for three days and nights. My servant women and I will be doing the same. After that, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. If I must die for doing it, I will die."

<sup>17</sup> Mordecai then left and did everything that Esther had told him to do.

*Sermon: Hope for such a time as this*

I worked in an office once where one of the bosses had a large red no entry sign on his door. Written underneath were the words 'entry forbidden (unless with cake and coffee)' and it was true, if you went in uninvited or without cake you were in trouble.

Queen Esther faced a sign on the king's door that was similar but more extreme. No entry. Death if you enter uninvited.

In chapter 4 of Esther, we meet Esther at this door considering asking for mercy for the Jews.

In the preceding chapters, we learn of how the evil royal advisor Haman has organised for all Jewish people in the city to be killed in a few days' time. Her adopted father Mordecai has asked her to plead for mercy for the Jews.

Esther was in a precarious position. the previous queen Vashti had been disposed of because she'd refused to come to parade in front of the king's friends after they had been on the razzle for 7 days and nights. Esther lived in the royal place harem, she had been selected from all the other women to be queen, she had completed all that was required of her, she was very beautiful and yet she had not been called for by the king for a month. She was literally not flavour of the month.

Esther was also vulnerable as no-one knew she was Jewish. She had hidden her racial identity in order to fit in with Susa life and now that the royal courts were turning against the Jewish people and about to kill them all, her life and her people's lives were in immediate danger.

Haman's complaint against the Jewish people begins and ends in racism – in chapter 3 he argues to the king that a certain race is scattered in his empire who observe customs unlike us and who don't obey you. In addition, he argues that this race is wealthy and so once killed, all of their money will fill the king's treasury.

King Zerxes believes Haman and puts the decree to kill all Jews out. This is the king's door that Esther is thinking about knocking on.

It is as if she is stepping up to the gallows.

She has but one hope – the sceptre of the king. If the king lowers his sceptre towards her, he will allow her to speak, he will be merciful

The sceptre of the king is a symbol of governance, of power and of authority. Our queen still uses one today at official

ceremonies. It is also a symbol of the kingdom of God. But God's sceptre is different to King Zerxes. Esther has to hope beyond hope that he might be merciful.

The sceptre God holds he holds in absolute love and grace and mercy. His door is never shut, his door always is open for those who seek him. His sceptre stands against injustice, racism and oppression and seeks to raise up the bullied, scared and weak to be strong in his love.

In lockdown we heard again the black lives matter campaign, we witnessed George Floyd's death. Some of us marched. Some of us prayed. Some of us campaigned. Lockdown has given us a special time, a time such as this where different voices can be heard. As part of our series on stories of justice in the bible over the summer, we reach Esther who spoke up for her people. She was in a particular place at a particular time and she used it for good.

Now in the UK is a special time, a time to speak up, a time to challenge racism and anti-Semitism wherever we see it or hear it. Each of us can challenge a racist joke or generalisation, each of us can welcome those who are different to us, each of us can be more friendly to those who do not look like us. Each of us can share on social media or discuss with friends the necessity to be anti-racist. All of us as a church can and should consider what can we do to be more inclusive and challenge racism wherever it may be found in such a time as this.

As Esther spoke, she spoke words of the kingdom of God, she offered the king a way to be kind and merciful, full of justice and peace. May we hear this call in our own lives too. How can we make a difference where we are? Is there a law or unfair practice that we can challenge in our workplace or country? Do we know of bullies and oppressive people who are unjust to others? Are we in a position to speak up for those who need justice?

Esther started out in some sort of ancient 'Love Island' style competition to be queen. All we know about her in the beginning was that she was beautiful, had a good figure and took her beauty regime very seriously. But here in chapter 4 we also learn that she knew when to pray.

More so, Esther led the people of God by calling her people to pray, and to pray with the earnest heart of fasting. She led them in a fast for 3 days and nights, for if the hope against hope was going to work – she knew they needed God's help. She knew the only way was to pray and listen to God at such a time as this.

When we pray, we knock on God's door, whenever we pray, God listens. whenever we pray God equips us with hope and a way forward.

May we be hopeful in prayer just as Esther was.

May we also be active and ready to speak for racial justice wherever we are as God calls us to for such a time as this.