

## ESTHER AND #METOO



### DRAMATIC SERMON PREACHED BY REV. DR. ALLOWAY AND THE PCOR DRAMA TEAM

*Scripture:*

**Psalm 19:7-14**

<sup>7</sup>The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup>the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup>the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. <sup>10</sup>More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup>Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. <sup>12</sup>But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. <sup>13</sup>Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

<sup>14</sup>Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

**Esther 7:1-6, 9-10**

<sup>1</sup>So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. <sup>2</sup>On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” <sup>3</sup>Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. <sup>4</sup>For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.”

<sup>5</sup>Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?” <sup>6</sup>Esther said, “A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

<sup>9</sup>Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” <sup>10</sup>So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



How many here have read the book of Esther? Here's the background you need to know. This is the story of a Hebrew woman in Persia, known as Esther. She becomes queen of Persia and thwarts a genocide of her Jewish people. This story forms the core of the Jewish festival of Purim celebrated in March every year. During Purim this story is read in homes and in the synagogue aloud twice: once in the evening and again the following morning.

Today's lectionary passage was to start with Chapter 7 in the book of Esther, but it is hard to understand the full story that way.

### **KING AHASUERUS**

Prior to chapter 7, King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes 1, is king over all the middle east and north African territory as far south as Ethiopia and as far East as Northern India.

Before the passage for today, the king has held a huge banquet for many days. On the seventh day the king was “in good humor” due to all the wine he had consumed. He invited his beautiful Queen Vashti to join him but he asked her to appear wearing only her Diadem (crown).

He further asked his Queen Vashti again to display her naked beauty to all the people at his elaborate celebration. She refused to come out of her chambers. So she was “deposed.” (Hebrew records say she was executed.)

The king’s advisors, including Haman, believed Vashti had “shamed” the king by refusing to do his bidding. They suggested the king declare in a royal decree that all women must “honor” and be submissive to their husbands, which he promptly decreed. The men in the king’s court used Vashti’s resistance to harassment as a tool for the oppression of women. Vashti’s noble act of modesty led to an imperial law to subdue women.

### HONOR KILLINGS

This ancient decree has led to the honor killing tradition in India, the Middle East and South Asia. Honor killings of women and girls still happen today. If a woman is accused of disobeying or dishonoring her husband or father and/or becomes a victim of rape, she can be killed and her murder is not prosecuted if the murderer claims it was an “honor killing.” It is estimated that twenty-thousand women and girls are killed every year around the world due to “honor killings.” It is like a global war on women.

After Vashti was killed the king orders that “all officers in his provinces shall select beautiful young virgins to be brought to his harem.” They were cleaned up and presented to the king.

### MORDECAI AND ESTHER

Mordecai was a Jew who had been raising a young woman after her parents died. Her name was Esther. She was the daughter of his father’s brother. So Esther considered Mordecai to be an uncle to her.

Esther was captured by the king’s men and brought into his harem. The Bible says her uncle paced back and forth in the courtyard of the harem out of his concern for her. He told Esther to not tell the king she was a Jew. Over time, Esther was chosen among all the others to be the new queen in the place of Vashti.

While her Uncle Mordecai was outside trying to protect Esther from afar, he overheard two of the king’s courtiers plotting to kill the king. Mordecai warned the king and the two traitors were executed immediately.

A memorandum praising Mordecai was added to the historical record book in the royal library for saving the king’s life. But soon it was forgotten.

### HAMAN

As time goes by, Haman, the king’s number one advisor, gains more power and becomes second in the kingdom. He decides to target the Jewish people because they refuse to worship the idols the rest of the empire worships. Haman tells the king that Jews are disobedient and hostile people. He encourages the king to make a decree to all the provinces that Jews are to be destroyed and their goods plundered on a certain day in the twelfth month.

When this news reaches her Uncle Mordecai, he frantically sends a note to Esther that said, “Remember you were once an ordinary person brought up under my care. Call upon the Lord and then speak to the king on behalf of your people to save them from death.”

### THE REST OF THE STORY

**Let’s look at the rest of this story in a different way and think about how it might apply to our lives today. We are called by God to be like Esther and protect the vulnerable from being abused in our current society.**

**Cast: King (Bill Morgan), Esther (Joy Olsen), Mordecai (Lindsay Olsen), Haman (Nate Scoble) Extras: (Nancy Morgan, Nita Pinney, Eddie Seamans Kim Seamans)**

**Narrator: (Pastor Cindy Alloway).**

*(All characters are on stage. Extras sit way off on one side.)*

**Narrator** *(Speaks from the back of choir.)* This scene today takes place in the palace of the king of the Persian Empire, King Ahasuerus.

**King:** I choose Esther to be my queen. Proclaim a royal holiday!! Come with me... *(King is on one side of stage walking in with Esther.)*

*(Haman (angry) and Mordecai are over on the other side out of earshot of the king.)*

**Haman:** So you're her uncle?

**Mordecai:** Yes! I'm so proud of her. Sorry, I must leave as the king has asked me to take up a new job for him. Great meeting you. *(Mordecai leaves stage.)*

**Haman:** You won't be proud for long... that upstart, that Mordecai! Who does he think he is? He is just a Jew! I must think of a way to get rid of him! He's too

good! The king will no longer favor me! ... (*Haman holds up a finger to his forehead as he thinks.*) Yesssss .... That's it! (*Haman turns toward the king.*)

**King:** Haman, you may speak.

**Haman:** Oh great one, do you know there are migrants in this land who do not follow our laws properly?! They are not like us. We must exile them and have them killed!

**King:** They must be evil!! We will get rid of them. Issue the order!

(*Haman exits.*)

**Extras** (*They come in to scene weeping loudly*): "What will we do?" "Where will we go?" (*And then move to side still quietly weeping.*)

(*Esther and Mordecai speak on one side away from the king, talking to each other.*)

**Esther:** The only way for our people to live is for me to see the king. Why does he think Jews are bad?

**Mordecai:** There are new instructions that if any Jew goes into the king's presence they will be killed. But if you remain silent our whole family and friends will die! Maybe God has placed you in this position?

**Esther:** Get all the others together and let's pray for me to have strength to help him learn the truth! (*Both Esther and Mordecai exit.*)

**Narrator** says: A little later on.....

(*King is still on-stage. Queen Esther enters towards the king.*)

**King:** You are welcome to come in. What is it Queen Esther?

**Esther:** Dear king, I have prepared a banquet for you and Haman. Can we dine together tomorrow?

**King:** Well, the way to my heart is through my stomach. ... Tomorrow then.

(*Esther quietly sets down a big book by the king before leaving. And Esther exits.*)

**Narrator** says: A little while later.

(*King is on-stage. King lies down. Snores. Wakes Up.*)

**King:** I can't sleep. I've tried counting sheep, camels ... nothing works. What book can I read?

(*A large book is next to him. The king opens it and says:*) Hmm, the history of the kingdom - that should help me go to sleep!

Wait. ... What does it say here? Oh dear. ... oh dear ... hmmm ... interesting. I read here about Mordecai! ... How he saved me from being killed! Oh, no! I forgot! I think that we all forgot to reward him!

(*Haman enters not having heard the king's words.*)

**King:** Haman, What do you think we should do for a person that the king wants to honor?

**Haman:** (*speaks to himself on the side*) The king wants to praise me! What a day. I will get rid of my enemy Mordecai on the gallows I built and get my reward!

(*Haman turns to the king and loudly says:* Put on him the robe of honor and parade him through the streets!

**King:** Do so. Call Mordecai and honor him!

(*Haman with a very dismayed look on his face exits, grumbling, Esther passes him on his way out and enters carrying food.*)

**King:** What great grub, Queen Esther! You not only look good but you can cook! Now, what is your special request?

**Esther:** If I have pleased you, then save my people. We are to be exiled and killed all because of one man!

**King:** Who is the man?

**Esther:** Haman.

**King:** What! ... I see now he was just trying to trick me into killing Mordecai!! Then hang him on the gallows!!!

(*Characters freeze except Esther who moves away from the king and recites this poem with the extras who speak from the background saying: "Me Too!"*)

**Esther says: Today, I have a name but too often  
I have been rendered nameless.**

**Me too!**

**Today, I had a voice but too often my voice  
has not been heeded.**

**Me too.**

**Today, I have my own body, but too often my  
body**

**has been abused or made to seem invisible.**

**Me too.**

**All these acts**

**To make a person**

**This person**

**Suffer and Disappear.**

**And yet**

**I have a name**

**And a voice**

**And respect my own body.**

**Together, in the midst of the others,**

**I make myself strong for all survivors**

**and for our collective surviving.**

**Me too!**

**Me too!**

### **AND NOW IN 2018**

Fast forward to 2018 and the #MeToo movement that began when Ashley Judd and Taylor Swift shared about their experiences of harassment. Thanks to their courage we are becoming aware that the respectful treatment of women has not progressed as much as we thought it would (ever since Vashti and Esther's era of

400 BCE.) Women's bodies are still objectified in male scripts, and young women are coerced into pleasing the men who control access to a successful career.

But there is hope! Modern day Vashtis from all over the world tweeted #MeToo to show solidarity with others who had been abused. On social media, one point seven million women from over eighty-five countries revealed they had been victims of sexual harassment through the MeToo movement on the internet.

### **#ITWASME**

Hopefully this could be a culturally transformative year as men are beginning to respond to the movement with #ItWasMe, admitting to harassing women or witnessing others and not stopping it. I am optimistic that both men and women can together change our broader culture's oppression of the vulnerable through the fervent pursuit of honesty and justice for all.

We should pray as Esther did and bravely address injustices when we see them. God said he could hear the blood of Abel cry out from the ground when Cain denied he had killed him. God knows when the vulnerable are abused even in the midst of denials. God also knows when we are silent while others are being mistreated, for we are called to be God's hands and feet and voice promoting justice on behalf of others. In Matthew, Jesus said, "So in everything, do unto others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." Voicing our protests over injustice and abuse is demonstrating that we are on the right side of God.

### **PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA RESPONSE**

On this topic, our PCUSA co-moderators wrote a letter to the churches in response to the #MeToo movement. They said, "This deeper cultural shift (that is so badly needed)," includes coming to terms "with all the ways we victimize and objectify people, including actions that are less noticeable. We have to be willing to examine and confess implicit gender biases that show themselves in pay disparities and comments about personal appearance."

In summary, they concluded, "*We must be a church committed to gender equity in all areas of our life together. ... We humbly ask that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continue to be a church in prayer, asking God to bring healing to the victimized, redemption and correction to the victimizer, and a cultural shift to our denomination so that we might have the abundant life promised to us by Jesus Christ.*

### **MAY IT BE SO!**

(Adapted From a poem titled: *Me Too: A Jewish Response to Abuse* by Devon Spier.)

This drama was adapted from a series called: *Honesty Plays* by Warren Grieve. Summary: This series of *Honesty Plays* can be adapted for use as straight drama. This one is from the book of Esther.

### **Benediction:**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen**



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