

“Fate or a Feather”  
Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22  
Rev. David Hutchinson  
Sunday, September 26, 2021

There are lots of things I don't know.

The longer I live - - the more I discover more things I don't know.

So - - the longer I live - - the less I know.

Meanwhile - - the longer I live - - the deeper my faith becomes.

In spite of tragedies - - and disappointments and challenges - - I remain faithful.

And by faithful I don't mean - - pious - - and I don't mean good.

And I don't mean - - at peace - - and I don't mean confident.

I simply mean that I am still a believer in God - -

- - and a would be follower of Jesus.

There is no guarantee of peace, success, or understanding - - as a result of faith.

Faith is not something we enter into to GET something back.

Faith is simply an act of choice - - and of love - - and of hope.

Faith is the choice to LIVE and to LOVE - - in spite of the challenges and the unanswered questions of life. / Which there are. / In my experience - - most times - life brings us more questions than answers. We wonder about WHY a terrible thing happened - - or we wonder if we have the whole story. We wish we knew - just what God wanted us to do. And so instead of acting in faith - we wait for some kind of certainty - which doesn't come.

Folks the certainty may never come. Life is like that...

Why are some people born in Afghanistan and end up as migrant refugees - - while others of us are born in the USA and live in Oregon? / Faith is NOT about answering that question - - faith - - is about living in spite of that question.

Theology might have some answers to propose.

Certain Biblical texts might have some answers to propose.

I've spent a life time studying those answers.

I have three degrees in religion from some pretty good schools.

I can tell you that the best answers I've found - - mostly - - don't satisfy.

As I said at the outset - - the longer I live the less I know.

But the longer I live - - the deeper my faith becomes.

So this sermon is not about certainty.

And certainty is not found in the Biblical text for today.

Today - - this is about something else...

The reading for this Sunday, from the book of Esther, leaves us with some unanswered questions about life. And yet it is a story about a woman – who acted in faith - - and who spoke up - - in spite of those unanswered - - silences.

So IF YOU are someone who has EVER struggled with questions of fairness or injustice - - like the questions I mentioned previously - - Esther might be a book for you.

If you have ever felt uncertain about life - - Esther might be a book for you.

Esther - - is a book of the Bible that does not mention God. You can go ahead and look if you want - - but I've read it - - more than once - - and I can tell you that God is not mentioned - - explicitly - - anywhere.

But - - that being said - - I can tell you - - I think you can clearly see - - God's spirit at work - - all over the place - - in the events of the story.

You can't prove with certainty - - using the scientific method - - that God was there. / But I can TELL you with certainty of faith - - that God WAS there.

Esther is a book about fate - - and providence.

It is about chance - - and about taking a chance.

Esther gets us pondering - - the nature of God.

How is God involved in the world?

How do we act - - in a faithful way - - when we see injustice?

Esther - - is unlike the book of Job which follows - - IN THAT it is less interested in the question of WHY God allows injustice - - and more interested in ACTING - - and speaking up - - and addressing the injustice.

Esther found herself in a time and place when – by speaking up – she could make a difference for good. And as she considered what to do – Mordecai – her cousin – who had adopted her after her parents died - - pondered her fate with her.

She was in the right place at the right time - - so to speak. / And instead of wondering too much about that - - she TOOK that chance and spoke up.

I wonder if you or I – would have acted like Esther?

I remember a time in the grocery store – when a simple event - - left me pondering my fate - - and issues similar to these. / I was in the so called “express lane”.

I had four items.

And as I stood there, a woman changed lanes – from the line she was in – to the one I was in. Now she was just behind me.

She said, “It’s not my lucky day today – this is the third lane I’ve been in. One had a bad register tape - - they all slow up – just when I choose them.”

At first I didn’t know what to say. I tried not to ponder the implications for me – now that I was in her lane too.

I thought about offering sympathy, “Hm - yea – grocery stores – it’s terrible”

But I was having a pretty **good** day so far, so instead I said, with optimism uncharacteristic for me when I’m in a grocery store line: “Well, I’ve had a pretty good day so far – so maybe my good day will balance out your bad day – and the line will go faster!”

After I said it – it didn’t sound so good.

“I hope so”, she said - - - sullenly.

And the line **did** move along fairly well. BUT - - I finished, and was picking up my bag, **and just then** - - another cashier showed up. She had a drawer of money. She said, “Excuse me ma’am it’s the end of my shift – this will just take a minute as we change money drawers – you’ll have to wait a moment.”

So there I was in the midst of life – pondering the un-fairness of it all.

What if she hadn’t switched lanes?

Why wasn’t I in her place?

These are the kinds of questions we ponder as we read Esther.

Only instead of an inconvenience - - it’s about life and death - - and injustice.

It’s a story – about Mordecai and Haman - - and a gallows – that was prepared for Moredcai’s execution – but on which Haman was hanged – instead.

The story begins as Esther's father and mother die. She was raised by her cousin Mordecai – as a young Jew – in a Persian kingdom. Which is to say – she was an OUTSIDER.

The Persian king - - pursued Esther as a bride. / His lust gave Esther an opportunity to access power and security - - and become an INSIDER. / She takes the opportunity. Esther had mixed feelings about her Jewish roots. / But maybe security was better than living in fear. / Powerless people make different choices than those with power and wealth.

As it turns out - - Esther and Mordecai maintained a connection - - and he stayed just outside the city gates - - to communicate with her.

Meanwhile Haman - - was a servant of the king. / Arrogant and abusive.

Mordecai would not respect or acknowledge him - - and he chose loyalty to his roots - - and his people - - over fear of some violent pushy political figure.

Sometimes no matter how much arrogant propaganda a leader throws out there - - at least a few people see through it - - and stick to their principles.

Well - - Haman got angry - - and decided that Mordecai would be hanged - - and then that he would annihilate ALL the Jews in the kingdom. / It would not be the last time some violent leader would make that choice.

In an impassioned speech to Esther, Mordecai said to her, “Don't think you will escape - - just because you are in the King's palace. You are a Jew. Remember who you are. If you keep silent - - someone will step up in your place - - and you and who knows who else - - might die.”

“Maybe you have been placed in your position - - SO that you can save us.”

“Esther - - maybe you are right where you need to be - - for such a time as this.”

Isn't the same true for us? / If we keep silent - - in the face of injustice and untruths and meanness and violence in the world and in our culture - - then what?

Will someone else step up - - if you don't?

Maybe you are RIGHT where you are - - for such a time as this.

Well - - Esther spoke up - - and the whole Jewish nation - - was saved.

The Jewish festival of Purim – celebrates this dramatic event.

As I said – God is never explicitly mentioned.

But can you see - - God at work - - behind these events?

The questions of fairness are not answered - - but we can still choose to see God.

Why did God save these Jews - - and not the 6 million in WW2?

That question is not answered by this book.

Why was the terror plot on a French Airliner stopped by Spencer Stone who got a Purple Heart - - but NOT the bombing of the World Trade Center?

That question is not answered.

Why did some of the Capital police force sacrifice their lives on January 6 - - while other people stood by or stepped away?

Why do some of the nurses in the ICU get Covid while trying to help?

We are invited to look into difficult events of life - - and look for God.

As we do - - remember - - God did not snatch Jesus from death on a cross.

Instead - - in Jesus - - God entered into tragedy with us.

Jesus endured the cross - - and yet offers the promise of resurrection.

Why it happened that way - - maybe that isn't as important as that is did.

If the writer of Esther could jump ahead in time and read the gospel - - that old rabbi might invite us to - - let go of our questions - - and just try to see God - - in the troubling painful courageous events of Jesus life, death, and resurrection.

Every moment in life is an opportunity for us to see God in that moment.

Anyone remember the movie “Forrest Gump” ?

At the end of the movie - - the main character Forrest Gump stands looking out over a field pondering the questions of life - - trying to think what to say.

He had saved the life of his friend Lieutenant Dan - - during the Vietnam War.

But then he watched Dan face the rest of his life - - living with a disability.

Dan had wanted to die in the war - - with honor.

Dan said it was his DESTINY to die in war - - it was his FATE.

But now he was saved - - and faced with LIFE.

By CONTRAST - - Forrest’s mother - - died inexplicably of a strange illness.

His mother did NOT want to die - - and she did.

As he stands at his mother’s grave he says:

“I wonder - - if we really have a DESTINY in life like Lieutenant Dan said - - or of it’s like Momma said - - and we are a feather in the wind.”

Fate - - or a feather in the wind?

Can BOTH be true? / Is EITHER one true?

In answer - - the book of Esther remains silent.

And on many deep question of life - - God remains silent as well.

In spite of our prayers - - or maybe in answer.

Esther urges us to live into our faith - - in ANY case.

Esther urges us to speak our truth into the silence.

Even in the face of unanswered questions.

On World Communion Sunday - - next week - - when Christians around the world are celebrating communion with us - - we have a unique opportunity to do that. We have not resolved the problems in this world that divide us from one another.

We haven't even figured out how to celebrate communion during Covid!

And yet - - we have this tradition - - of a celebration at table - - and in that - - we can see God at work if we choose.

The things we do - - large or small - - done in faith - - are acts of HOPE.

Hope - - in spite of the uncertainty - - in spite of fear.

The world IS divided - - and there IS fear - - and there IS pain...

BUT... We WILL act in faith.

We live in hope for a kind of unity that this world has not yet known.

We live in FAITH - - that one day we will see - -

- - God's intention for us - - FULFILLED. .

Esther invites us to see God - - EVEN when God is behind the scenes.

Which is a LOT of the time.

May we CONTINUE to accept the call - - to live - - faithfully - -

- - in such a time as this.

Who KNOWS - - maybe YOU - - are right where you are supposed to be!

Who KNOWS - - maybe you have exactly what it takes!

WHO knows...? / Maybe YOU do.