

The Story Series

Week 20: Esther

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It's hard to believe that it was twenty weeks ago that we embarked on this journey called *The Story*. We are making our way through the Bible – chronologically – and discovering that the Bible is really one, interconnected story from cover to cover. I chose to do this series for two reasons: 1) Bible illiteracy runs rampant among Christians today; we no longer know the basic stories of the Bible. And so, each week I shared a story from the Bible in hopes that not only our knowledge of Scripture might increase, but that our faith would mature as well as we come to realize how powerfully God is at work in the lives of his people.

The second reason I chose to do this series is for selfish reasons. I get easily bored doing the same things over and over. Yes, I have great respect for the lectionary and our Lutheran liturgy. But week after week, year after year of doing the same thing can become monotonous. Before we know it, we begin to just go through the motions rather than have a one-on-one encounter with the LORD as we gather in his presence. And so this series has offered me a chance to try some new things... like incorporate videos in worship and preach on the book of Esther.

Yeah, that's right. I've never before preached on the book of Esther. Heck, I have a hard time even finding the book of Esther in the Bible, much less preaching about her. She's tucked in tightly behind Ezra and Nehemiah in the Old Testament.

When you finally locate the book of Esther and read through the tiny book, something sticks out like a sore thumb. God is nowhere to be found. That's right. The word "God" doesn't appear in the book of Esther. I would have loved to have been in the room when the early church was deciding which books should make it into the Bible, and which books should be left out. Can you imagine the discussion they had as to why a book which contains no mention of God should even be considered as Holy Scripture? Let's face it: the book of Esther reads more like a soap opera than a book of sacred Scripture!

And so, as I read through the book of Esther, not once finding "God," I asked, "God, what in heaven's name do you want me to do with this book? How can I help others see you at work when *I* can't even find you?" And God answered back: just because you can't notice me at first glance doesn't mean I'm not there; just because my presence is not recorded doesn't mean that my power is not at work."

All of us have asked at some point in our life: "God, where are you?" It's usually during times of trial and suffering that we question whether or not God is around, whether God is holding up his part of the deal to watch over us and to protect us from harm. The book of Esther reminds us that just because we can't see God, just because there is no evidence of

God's presence, doesn't mean that God is not there. As we have seen time and time again as we made our way through *The Story*, God's greatest desire is to be with us, to walk by our side every step of the way. Even Jesus promised, "I am with you always, until the end of the age."

One thing that is easily recognizable as you read through the book of Esther is all of the coincidences. It just so happened that the queen stood up to the king, so the king divorced her and started to look for another queen. It just so happened that the king took a liking to Esther – who, unbeknownst to the king – was a Jew (one of God's own people). It turns out that the king developed a distaste for God's people because they refused to give him their allegiance; they would only worship the one, true God.

So the king decides that an act of genocide is in order. But because Queen Esther is at the right place at the right time, she is able to save God's people when she informs the king that she, too, is a Jew and to kill all Jews meant to murder her as well. Because of the king's great love for Esther, he changes his mind and saves God's people.

Ask yourself: Are all of those details, which fall neatly into place at just the right time, are they just a bunch of coincidences? Or it is evidence that God's hand is at work – behind the scenes – ensuring the protection and blessing of his people?

It's often impossible to pin down exactly how God operates, how God works in our daily lives. But the Bible assures us that God is at work. As I listen to you tell me the stories of your life, it's becomes harder and harder for me to believe in coincidence. Over and over again, I see the power of God at work in your lives. It's just that often God works behind the scenes.

When we take the story of Esther seriously, it's impossible for us to look at the world in the same way. I recently learned that one of the amazing things about the human brain (the way God created us) is that our human brain can handle seven things at one time. It's the way we are wired. Think about it this way. When they started adding area codes to phone numbers, what happened? We stopped memorizing phone numbers. Why? Most of us can't handle 10 numbers; we can only handle seven. It's the way our human brain is wired. We can only handle seven dimensions at one time.

So why is that important to know when we consider the story of Esther? It's because God, the creator of the universe, is not limited by seven dimensions. God can work in and through millions and millions of dimensions all at one time. It's one of the perks of being divine, immortal. There are no limitations.

When out-of-the-ordinary stuff happens to us, we say to ourselves, "That was weird. What was *that* all about?" The ways of God can seem so odd at times because we can only comprehend reality in seven dimensions. God operates on such a grander scale than we do that it is nearly impossible to try to pinpoint exactly what God is up to. That why we call it "mystery." It's beyond comprehension, and yet real and true all at the same time. God is in

control, but God acts in such dynamic ways that we can't fully wrap our brains around it. God is near, and yet God's presence takes so many forms that often times it becomes difficult to point to something specific and say, "Look, there, it's God. Don't you see Him?"

So if God is so beyond us and acts in such dynamic ways, how in the world can we ever relate to God? On our own, it is impossible. But God has given us a special gift which allows us to sense things and perceive things beyond our normal seven dimensions. And that gift is called the Holy Spirit.

It was at that glorious Pentecost event fifty days after Easter when God showers the Holy Spirit upon his church. The gift of the Holy Spirit allowed God's people to see things and to do things that were beyond their normal capacities. Their eyes were opened and they sensed the true presence of God among them. Their mouths were opened and they begin to boldly proclaim to all people – in languages foreign to them – the saving message of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit opens our minds up to the million-dimension-ways of God.

So how does one receive this awesome gift of the Holy Spirit? By golly, you've already got it! On the day you were baptized, God declared to you, "Child of God, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." God showered his Holy Spirit into our life on that day we were baptized. And the Holy Spirit allows us to perceive that the events in our life aren't just a bunch of random events, but rather they are specific moments that God is weaving together to reveal his will for our life. Believing that it is God's greatest desire to bless us, we can celebrate (as the Bible reveals in Romans 8) that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purposes.

Esther's story is a dramatic reminder that God doesn't plant us somewhere by accident. God has placed us where we are for a reason. God doesn't make mistakes. God will find a way to get us where we need to be so that he may use us to bring forth his kingdom. I often joke that every place God has sent me to serve in ministry I had to look up on a map to find the way. Ten years ago, I had no desire to come to North Texas. But my life is not my own. God had other purposes for my life that, at the time, I couldn't fully comprehend with my limited seven dimension brain.

Through my service to this congregation, I have learned that God knows what he is doing. I am not here by accident; this is God's will for my life. I know this because I have been so richly blessed serving you here at Trinity. God is bringing forth his kingdom through you and through me as we willingly follow God's leading.

All of us, I believe, need to remember and celebrate that God's Holy Spirit has been showered into our lives. And that Holy Spirit gives us eyes to see, ears to hear, mouths to speak the wonder-working power of God in the world. God is here. Even if we can't put our finger on it, God is here. The people we bump into, the unexpected phone calls, the seemingly random events of our lives... God is intertwining all of that together to issue in

his kingdom. And there we are in the middle of it all. We are carriers of God's untamable Spirit.

Just as God used Esther, God will use us to bring forth his kingdom. God will use our willing hearts to bring about "such a time as this" to further God's mission to save all people. With God orchestrating all things, our willing hearts will be the means by which God's kingdom comes, God's will is done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Thanks be to God! Amen.