

Well, That Was Unexpected!
The Unexpected Call of Esther

May 3, 2020

We continue our worship series: *“Well, That Was Unexpected!”* We are looking at people from the Bible whom God led in surprising and unexpected ways. Their entire world was turned upside down, leaving them disoriented and cut off from the way things used to be. What can we learn from their stories that helps us in living out our story today?

Today we consider God’s call of Esther. One the one hand, Esther’s unexpected rise from lowly Jewish girl to queen was a wonderful thing for her. But there was another unexpected call. She was also called by God to be the means of saving her people – even if it meant putting her own life on the line. God raised her up to that place at the time for a purpose. Do we see ourselves as having been called by God for the place and time we find ourselves today?

Welcome

“Christ the Lord is Risen Today” (LSB 463)

Christ the Lord is ris'n today; Alleluia!	Hail, the victim undefiled, Alleluia!
Christians, hasten on Your way; Alleluia!	God and sinners reconciled, Alleluia!
Offer praise with love replete, Alleluia!	When contending death and life, Alleluia!
At the paschal victim's feet. Alleluia!	Met in strange and awesome strife. Alleluia!
For the sheep the Lamb has bled, Alleluia!	Christians, on this holy day, Alleluia!
Sinless in the sinner's stead. Alleluia!	All Your grateful homage pay; Alleluia!
Christ the Lord is ris'n on high; Alleluia!	Christ the Lord is ris'n on high; Alleluia!
Now He lives no more to die. Alleluia!	Now He lives, no more to die. Alleluia!

Invocation

Confession and Forgiveness

Readings

First Reading: Esther 2:1-18

Later when King Xerxes’ fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. ²Then the king’s personal attendants proposed, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. ³Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. ⁴Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.” This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

⁵ Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, ⁶ who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. ⁷ Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

⁸ When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. ⁹ She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.

¹⁰ Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. ¹¹ Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

¹² Before a young woman's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. ¹³ And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴ In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.

¹⁵ When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. ¹⁶ She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

¹⁷ Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸ And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 27:1-5

The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When the wicked advance against me
to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes

who will stumble and fall.
³ Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.
⁴ One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek Him in His temple.
⁵ For in the day of trouble
He will keep me safe in His dwelling;
He will hide me in the shelter of His sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Second Reading: Esther 4:1-17

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ² But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. ³ In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴ When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

⁶ So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

⁹ Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ¹¹ "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

¹² When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but

you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

**People: Alleluia! Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," He told him, and Matthew got up and followed Him.

¹⁰ While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Him and His disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³ But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

This is the Gospel of the Lord
Praise to You O Christ

Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Children's Message

Alleluia! Jesus is Risen!

Alleluia! Jesus is risen!
Trumpets resounding in glorious light!
Splendor, the Lamb, Heaven forever!
Oh, what a miracle God has in sight!
Jesus is risen and we shall arise:
Give God the glory! Alleluia!

Walking the way, Christ in the center
Telling the story to open our eyes;
Breaking our bread, Giving us glory:
Jesus our blessing, our constant surprise.
Jesus is risen and we shall arise:
Give God the glory! Alleluia!

Jesus the vine, We are the branches;
Life in the Spirit the fruit of the tree;
Heaven to earth, Christ to the people,
Gift of the future now flowing to me.
Jesus is risen and we shall arise:
Give God the glory! Alleluia!

Weeping be gone; Sorrow, be silent:
Death put asunder, and Easter is bright.
Cherubim sing: "O grave, be open!"
Clothe us in wonder, adorn us in light.
Jesus is risen and we shall arise:
Give God the glory! Alleluia!

City of God, Easter forever,
Golden Jerusalem, Jesus the Lamb,
River of Life, Saints and archangels,
Sing with creation to God the I AM!
Jesus is risen and we shall arise:
Give God the glory! Alleluia!

Sermon

"You Shine"

Why should I fear man
 when You made the heavens
Why should I be afraid
 when You put the stars in place
Why should I lose heart
 when I know how great You are
Why should I give up
 when Your plans are full of love

In this world we will have trouble
But You have overcome the world

Chorus
You shine brighter than the brightest star
Your love purer than the purest heart
You shine
Filling us with courage and strength
To follow You **repeat**

Prayers

Please add your prayer requests to the live chat

Thanksgivings

Pastor: O Lord, we praise You.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Petitions

Pastor: Lord, in Your mercy,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

*The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you
The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace
Amen.*

And All the People Said Amen

You are not alone if you are lonely	love is what we're after
When you feel afraid you're not the only	We're all broken
We are all the same in need of mercy	but we're all in this together
To be forgiven and be free	God knows we stumble and fall
It's all you got to lean on	And He so loved the world
But thank God it's all you need	He sent His son to save us all
	<i>(chorus)</i>

Chorus

And all the people said amen whoa	Blessed are the poor in spirit
And all the people said amen	who are torn apart
Give thanks to the Lord	Blessed are the persecuted
For His love never ends	and the pure in heart
And all the people said amen	Blessed are the people hungry
	for another start
If you're rich or poor	For theirs is the kingdom
Well it don't matter	The kingdom of God <i>(chorus)</i>
Weak or strong you know	

Offering

<http://stjohnslutheran.net/give/>

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Why do you think Mordecai wanted Esther to keep her Judaism a secret? Are there ever times when it would be appropriate to keep our Christianity a secret? Why or why not?
2. Once she was chosen for the King's harem, Esther had to set aside most of the practices and traditions of her faith. In this time of quarantine, we have had to set aside some of our practices and traditions. What has been hardest to set aside? What has been most important to hold on to?
3. Our Gospel reading focuses on the call of Matthew. How do you think this unexpected call affected his life? Why do you think he wanted to throw a party for his friends? We can't throw normal parties these days, but do you have friends that you can invite to meet your Savior? Online?
4. Mordecai called on Esther to rethink the reason she became queen. She was to see her royal status as a calling from God to follow Him faithfully in the place where God had put her. Think of your calling as a worker, neighbor, parent, sibling, etc. How is God calling you to serve faithfully in these places?
5. We are the people that the Lord has chosen to be His church during these days of pandemic. We are not victims. We are called. What can you do to keep this mindset in the days and weeks ahead?

St. John's People and Families to Pray for This Week

John & Kristi Clark
George Fleishmann
Shirley Knight
Jon, Jennie, & Jessica Lovie
Chris, Beth, Jaicee, & Seamus Vecera
Mark, Brittany & Uriah Carducci
Rob, Nicole, Scarlett, & Sydney Fuller
Mark, Jonna, Ethan, & Evan Lewis
Trevor, Alyssa, & Sophie Pridmore
Michael, Juliane & AnaSophia Veselik

Memory Verse for This Week

And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:14b

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