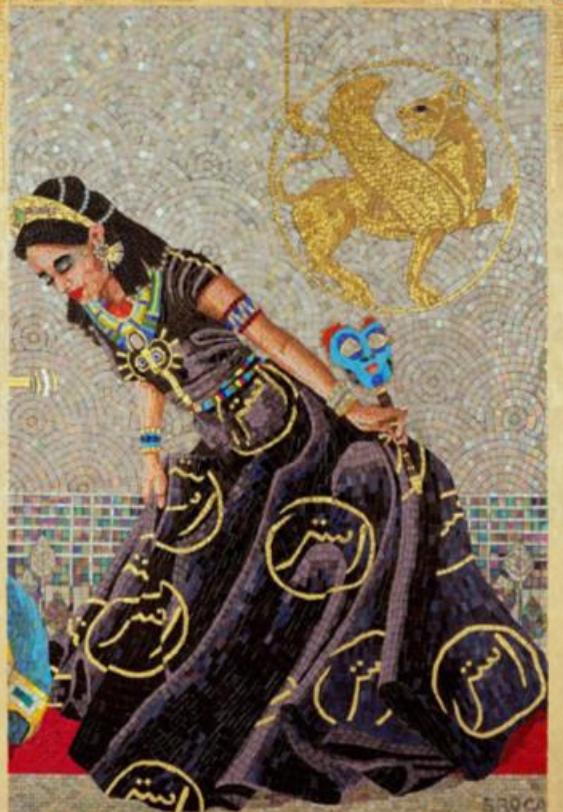


A TIME SUCH AS THIS



Lenten Devotions from
the Book of Esther

This Lenten devotion is a collaborative effort between 9 pastors representing 6 different congregations and 4 different denominations or traditions. Many the pastors represented in this devotional participate in a weekly “text-study,” in Coeur d’Alene, where pastors preaching from the Revised Common Lectionary gather to study in community prior to preaching on the following Sunday. Such community Bible studies exist because disciples of Jesus recognize that when we study scripture in community with others, whose views are not identical to our own, we develop a deeper more robust understanding of who God is, who we are, and who we are in relationship to God.

We commend the Bible’s book of Esther to you as a miraculous account of how every-day people of God are called to do extraordinary things in the face of daunting cultural difficulties.

What is Lent?

The season of Lent (40-days without Sundays prior to Easter) has been celebrated, in various forms, by Christians since at least the late 3rd Century, though probably not called “Lent” until the 11th Century. This is traditionally a season of intentional self-examination and Christian study. Throughout the centuries many Christians have used these 40-days as a season to prepare for baptism, to fast, for confession, and for meditation.

Lent is a season for reflecting honestly about who we are, who God is, and who we are in relationship to God. This includes honest reflection regarding our brokenness and sinfulness, God’s greatness and holiness, as well as God’s unfathomable love and grace.

How to use this devotional:

We have broken the book of Esther into 40 bite size nuggets of scripture. One for each of the 40 days between Ash Wednesday (Feb. 26) and Good Friday (Apr. 10). Sundays are always a celebration of Easter, and as such the church has excluded them from the season of Lent. You will notice that there are no readings assigned for Sundays.

We hope that you will use these devotions as a starting point for faith filled conversations. Read them with your family, share them with your friends, talk about them over coffee or lunch. Join a Lenten Bible study using these devotions. Certainly, we hope you will read them each day on you own, but really we want you to talk about this story with others and see what the Holy Spirit does.

Family Activities:

Each week of Lent, on Fridays, we have suggested a cross-generational activity that you can do with your children, grandchildren or whoever you like. There is no reason you would need to do these on a Friday, use them as you like?

Day 1 – Ash Wednesday, February 26

The Alluring Pull of Foreign Culture

Esther 1: 1-4

¹ These events happened in the days of King Xerxes, who reigned over 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. ² At that time Xerxes ruled his empire from his royal throne at the fortress of Susa. ³ In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. He invited all the military officers of Persia and Media as well as the princes and nobles of the provinces. ⁴ The celebration lasted 180 days-- a tremendous display of the opulent wealth of his empire and the pomp and splendor of his majesty.

Devotional Commentary: King Xerxes's position required a feast to invite all the military officers, princes and nobles in order to unify them. However, there wasn't unity among his kingdom due to the Anti-Semitism and Jewish influence. The alluring pull of foreign culture and contrary laws seduced many Jews to lose their calling as a holy people. What Israel's Prophets failed to accomplish, in calling Israel back to God, was accomplished in one action by Haman's signet ring to kill them. No doubt, it compelled them to repent and remember who they were: *"I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me."* (John 17:23)

Father, grant me diligence to be united in You so the world will not affect me in losing focus on my calling.

Pastor John Popp – Messianic Jewish Pastor

Day 2 – Thursday, February 27

From the Greatest to the Least

Esther 1:4-9

⁴ The celebration lasted 180 days-- a tremendous display of the opulent wealth of his empire and the pomp and splendor of his majesty. ⁵ When it was all over, the king gave a banquet for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were in the fortress of Susa. It lasted for seven days and was held in the courtyard of the palace garden. ⁶ The courtyard was beautifully decorated with white cotton curtains and blue hangings, which were fastened with white linen cords and purple ribbons to silver rings embedded in marble pillars. Gold and silver couches stood on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and other costly stones. ⁷ Drinks were served in gold goblets of many designs, and there was an abundance of royal wine, reflecting the king's generosity. ⁸ By edict of the king, no limits were placed on the drinking, for the king had instructed all his palace officials to serve each man as much as he wanted. ⁹ At the same time, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

Devotional Commentary: From the greatest to the least. We are early into Lent this year, this being the second day. It is perhaps a good thing to remember, as we are beginning this journey through this season which will end with Christ not only crucified but also resurrected, that this banquet, this banquet of life is given from the greatest to the least. We often place limitations on who is invited to this banquet...perhaps even

unintentionally; but it is not our banquet, we are merely guests. God has ordered this banquet, and He has opened the doors for all, from the greatest to the least.

Lord Jesus, thank you for this banquet of life, help us to remember who all is invited.

Pastor Dan Forsgren, Trinity Lutheran Church, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Day 3 – Friday, February 28

Deadly Sins and a Costly Refusal

Esther 1: 9-12

⁹ At the same time, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰ On the seventh day of the feast, when King Xerxes was in high spirits because of the wine, he told the seven eunuchs who attended him-- Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas-- ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman. ¹² But when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.

Devotional Commentary: Pride, privilege, and power are the backdrop of the king's party. Xerxes, a ruler who likes to be adored, is used to his world responding exactly as he wants. At an excessive feast to show his grandness and wealth. he invites Vashti not to honor her, but to show her off to other powerful men as a beautiful thing, a prized possession. Vashti's refusal changes the game. Big pride, and big anger – two of the seven deadly sins, in quick succession. Pride grows with power. Anger burns hot for the proud when they don't get their way. There's a cost to stand up and say "No" to such pride and power. What Vashti does here, Mordecai does later.

Lord of All, since you created each of us human beings in your image, help us to respect each person's dignity, to love others as much as we love ourselves, and to stand with courage and wisdom for our own dignity in the face of the proud. In the name of Christ, who loves the world.

Fr. David Gortner is the Rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Coeur d'Alene, ID.

Week 1 – Family Activity – How to Throw a Banquet

Have a fancy dinner. Use fancy plates and glasses. Bust out the real napkins and find a nice tablecloth. Maybe light some candles. Perhaps the food is normal family dinner fare but turn the meal into a celebration. Let everyone help with some aspect of preparation. As you enjoy your meal ask a few questions: 1) What makes some meals more special than others. 2) Who would you invite to a fancy meal? Why? 3) Have you ever been invited to a party where you felt you really weren't wanted?

Have a grown-up read Esther 1: 1-22. 4) Why do you think Queen Vashti was so upset? 5) What do you think of King Xerxes after hearing this story?

Have a grown-up read Luke 14: 7-15. 6) How was King Xerxes banquet different from the way Jesus describes a banquet?

Day 4 – Saturday, February 29

There Oughtta Be a Law!

Esther 1: 12-18

¹² But when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.

¹³ He immediately consulted with his wise advisers, who knew all the Persian laws and customs, for he always asked their advice. ¹⁴ The names of these men were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan-- seven nobles of Persia and Media. They met with the king regularly and held the highest positions in the empire. ¹⁵ "What must be done to Queen Vashti?" the king demanded. "What penalty does the law provide for a queen who refuses to obey the king's orders, properly sent through his eunuchs?" ¹⁶ Memucan answered the king and his nobles, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also every noble and citizen throughout your empire. ¹⁷ Women everywhere will begin to despise their husbands when they learn that Queen Vashti has refused to appear before the king. ¹⁸ Before this day is out, the wives of all the king's nobles throughout Persia and Media will hear what the queen did and will start treating their husbands the same way. There will be no end to their contempt and anger.

Devotional Commentary: Queen Vashti's refusal to display herself for the entertainment of the drunken Persian king, and his retinue, enraged the despot who then asks his counselors, "What penalty does the law provide...?" "There Oughtta be a Law" is the common notion that problems can be solved by making a law. The king's chief counselor sees dire consequences of her refusal. What injustice in your life would you like to fix with a law? What might be the result of such a law? What might be an alternative to such a law?

Give me the wisdom, Lord to take a breath when I'm bound by anger, and to consider how you'd have me respond. Amen

Grant MacLean, retired pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church, active member of Trinity Lutheran Church

Sunday, March 1 – No devotions on Sundays

Day 5 – Monday, March 2

No Longer Right

Esther 1: 18-22

¹⁸ Before this day is out, the wives of all the king's nobles throughout Persia and Media will hear what the queen did and will start treating their husbands the same way. There will be no end to their contempt and anger. ¹⁹ "So if it please the king, we suggest that you issue a written decree, a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be revoked. It should order that Queen Vashti be forever banished from the presence of King Xerxes, and that the king should choose another queen more worthy than she. ²⁰ When this decree is published throughout the king's vast empire, husbands everywhere, whatever their rank, will receive proper respect from their wives!" ²¹ The king and his nobles thought this made good sense, so he followed Memucan's counsel. ²² He sent letters to all parts of the empire, to each province in its own script and

language, proclaiming that every man should be the ruler of his own home and should say whatever he pleases.

Devotional Commentary: “Husbands everywhere, whatever their rank will receive proper respect from their wives. The king and his nobles thought this made good sense” Of course they thought this made good sense, they were men, and powerful men at that. We like to believe we are civilized centuries away from decrees announcing men as “rulers in their own homes, doing whatever pleases them.” Yet violence by men against women continues today as if King Xerxes lived on Pennsylvania Avenue, and is still a reality in every culture, nation, kingdom, city and state. We can’t fault King Xerxes nor his noblemen for treating women as chattel. It is what the king decree as proper and write and so it was. It is no longer right! Today we have NO right, NO decree and NO excuse for treating women except with respect and honor. Because I would bet that is what you hope and desire for the women in your life?

O God, today help me live not by what pleases me but by what is a pleasure to you.

Mike Grabenstein, ELCA retired.

Day 6 – Tuesday, March 3

The Beauty Pageant

Esther 1:22 – 2:4

^{1:22} He sent letters to all parts of the empire, to each province in its own script and language, proclaiming that every man should be the ruler of his own home and should say whatever he pleases.

^{2:1} But after Xerxes' anger had subsided, he began thinking about Vashti and what she had done and the decree he had made. ² So his personal attendants suggested, "Let us search the empire to find beautiful young virgins for the king. ³ Let the king appoint agents in each province to bring these beautiful young women into the royal harem at the fortress of Susa. Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the harem, will see that they are all given beauty treatments. ⁴ After that, the young woman who most pleases the king will be made queen instead of Vashti." This advice was very appealing to the king, so he put the plan into effect.

Devotional Commentary: King Xerxes disposed of Queen Vashti. He was offended by her refusal. His ego had been bruised, and he listens to his personal attendants. First the king sends a proclamation that every man is the ruler in his own home. Secondly, he gathers all the beautiful young women of the empire. There will be a beauty contest to determine the next queen. God can even use the bruised ego of a head-strong ruler, and the plans of ill-advised advisors to bring about his will.

Dear God, save us from being tyrants of our own little “kingdoms” and thank you for using even our easily bruised egos to bring about your will.

Pastor Bob Albing – Lutheran Church of the Master, Coeur d’Alene, ID

Day 7 – Wednesday, March 4

Remembering His Faithfulness

Esther 2: 4-7

⁴ After that, the young woman who most pleases the king will be made queen instead of Vashti." This advice was very appealing to the king, so he put the plan into effect.

⁵ At that time there was a Jewish man in the fortress of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a descendant of Kish and Shimei. ⁶ His family had been among those who, with King Jehoiachin of Judah, had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. ⁷ This man had a very beautiful and lovely young cousin, Hadassah, who was also called Esther. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter.

Devotional Commentary: Can you imagine what the odds were that Esther would be chosen to become the new queen of Persia? She was one of hundreds, possibly thousands. Now, if you know the rest of the story, can you imagine what would have happened if Esther wasn't chosen as queen? Each of us, in our own lives, have had moments where the odds seemed overwhelmingly out of our favor. But when we take a look back, the Lord always showed Himself faithful. The key is to remember that when we're faced with challenges that seem overwhelming, He is faithful – always.

Father in heaven, thank you for Your faithfulness and help us to remember when we're faced with life's challenges that You are always faithful.

Bill Miller – Pastor at Beth Shalom Messianic Fellowship in Post Falls, ID

Day 8 – Thursday, March 5

Devine Adoption

Esther 2: 7-11

⁷ This man had a very beautiful and lovely young cousin, Hadassah, who was also called Esther. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter. ⁸ As a result of the king's decree, Esther, along with many other young women, was brought to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa and placed in Hegai's care. ⁹ Hegai was very impressed with Esther and treated her kindly. He quickly ordered a special menu for her and provided her with beauty treatments. He also assigned her seven maids specially chosen from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem. ¹⁰ Esther had not told anyone of her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had directed her not to do so. ¹¹ Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her.

Devotional Commentary: Esther's life is marked with tragedy. We don't know how old she was when her parents died, but undoubtedly their death helped shaped her life. Mordecai adopted Esther, raised her as his own daughter, and clearly did a good job of helping her to grow into a woman who was marked by tragedy but not defined by it. We too live lives that are marked by tragedy, hardship, and brokenness. We too are adopted by our Heavenly Father and showered with love, grace, and mercy. When we embrace and

trust God's claiming of us as his own adopted child, we too can find that while tragedy may shape us, God's love defines us.

Father in Heaven, thank you for choosing me as your child, help shape my life so that your love is the first thing others see when they look at me.

Pastor Matt Erickson – Calvary Lutheran Church, Post Falls, ID

Day 9 - Friday, March 6

Waiting

Esther 2: 11-14

¹¹ Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her.

¹² Before each young woman was taken to the king's bed, she was given the prescribed twelve months of beauty treatments-- six months with oil of myrrh, followed by six months with special perfumes and ointments. ¹³ When it was time for her to go to the king's palace, she was given her choice of whatever clothing or jewelry she wanted to take from the harem. ¹⁴ That evening she was taken to the king's private rooms, and the next morning she was brought to the second harem, where the king's wives lived. There she would be under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would never go to the king again unless he had especially enjoyed her and requested her by name.

Devotional Commentary: For twelve months, Mordecai & Esther waited. Mordecai waited for news of the cousin he raised. Esther waited, too. She waited to meet the King in the beauty pageant she entered—her chance to become queen. Both waited. Each used the opportunities available to prepare. Mordecai prepared by walking the harem's courtyard, getting to know people. Esther prepared by learning to seek and take advice, wisdom (Pr 13:10). God blessed & used them both. Mordecai became the King's top advisor. Esther became queen. Together, they saved their people. In Lent, we wait on the Lord. As we wait, let's prepare with each opportunity God gives us.

Lord, help us seek and use each opportunity to know and love You more.

Bill Stonebraker – Pastor at Faith Presbyterian Church in Hayden, ID

Week 2 – Family Activity – Attend A Purim Celebration

Purim Celebration for Kids and their grown-ups.

At Calvary Lutheran Church with Beth Shalom Messianic Jewish Fellowship

5:30 p.m. – Crafts, costumes, a Purim Play, dinner and more

Purim is a Jewish holiday that celebrates God's miraculous saving of the Jewish people through every-day means. It is a day for remembering the persecution Jews face and the multiple times throughout history that Jews have been singled out as scapegoats and targeted for annihilation.

While the significance of the celebration is serious the celebration is a party for kids of all ages. The highlight is usually an interactive reading, or acting out, of the story of Esther where kids get to dress-up, shout at the actors, and interact with the Characters.

Day 10- Saturday, March 7

Submission brings out true grace and beauty

Esther 2: 14-18

¹⁴ That evening she was taken to the king's private rooms, and the next morning she was brought to the second harem, where the king's wives lived. There she would be under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would never go to the king again unless he had especially enjoyed her and requested her by name.

¹⁵ Esther was the daughter of Abihail, who was Mordecai's uncle. (Mordecai had adopted his younger cousin Esther.) When it was Esther's turn to go to the king, she accepted the advice of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem. She asked for nothing except what he suggested, and she was admired by everyone who saw her. ¹⁶ Esther was taken to King Xerxes at the royal palace in early winter of the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷ And the king loved Esther more than any of the other young women. He was so delighted with her that he set the royal crown on her head and declared her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸ To celebrate the occasion, he gave a great banquet in Esther's honor for all his nobles and officials, declaring a public holiday for the provinces and giving generous gifts to everyone.

Devotional Commentary: When we submit, the LORD will provide the necessary authority figures to instruct us. Esther didn't need to ask for anything because she submitted under God for Hegai's leadership. True submission to authority figures will bring out our inner grace. The Hebrew word for grace is "*chanan*" which pictures a nomad's camp of family tents and is viewed as beauty. Why? Because it is a place of warmth, love, friendship and sustenance. Esther was admired because she became a dwelling place of warmth and love for others. As we submit to His authorities, allow His grace to extend friendship.

Father, help me to submit under my authorities so I can become a camp of warmth and friendship for others.

Pastor John Popp – Messianic Jewish Pastor

Sunday, March 8 – No devotions on Sundays

Day 11—Monday, March 9

Did they get the point?

Esther 2:18-23

¹⁸ To celebrate the occasion, he gave a great banquet in Esther's honor for all his nobles and officials, declaring a public holiday for the provinces and giving generous gifts to everyone.

¹⁹ Even after all the young women had been transferred to the second harem and Mordecai had become a palace official, ²⁰ Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. She was still following Mordecai's directions, just as she did when she lived in his home. ²¹ One day as Mordecai was on duty at the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthana and Teresh-- who were guards at the door of the king's private quarters-- became angry at King Xerxes and plotted to assassinate him. ²² But Mordecai heard about the plot and gave the information to Queen Esther. She then told the king about it and gave Mordecai

credit for the report. ²³ When an investigation was made and Mordecai's story was found to be true, the two men were impaled on a sharpened pole. This was recorded in *The Book of the History of King Xerxes' Reign*.

Devotional Commentary: Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. Do we do this? Do we hide all or even a part of who we are; afraid of what the consequences might be if we reveal our true selves? Mordecai must have thought that if he had given warning to the King he might not be believed, who was he, a palace official yes, but was he afraid of how the information would be received from him? He thought the news better coming from the Queen. Eventually, the truth will save Esther's people, and the truth of this plot brought Bigthana and Teresh to a sharpened pole.

Lord, help us be true to who we are as your beloved children.

Pastor Dan Forsgren, Trinity Lutheran Church, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Day 12 – Tuesday, March 10

Pride, Anger, and Courage – Take 2

Esther 2:23 – 3:5

^{2:23} When an investigation was made and Mordecai's story was found to be true, the two men were impaled on a sharpened pole. This was all recorded in *The Book of the History of King Xerxes' Reign*.

^{3:1} Some time later King Xerxes promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. ² All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect. ³ Then the palace officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" ⁴ They spoke to him day after day, but still he refused to comply with the order. So they spoke to Haman about this to see if he would tolerate Mordecai's conduct, since Mordecai had told them he was a Jew. ⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or show him respect, he was filled with rage.

Devotional Commentary: Once again, we see the role that pride, privilege, and power have in this Empire. Everyone must bow down to Haman, just like they do to the king. Mordecai refuses to bow and stands alone. Centuries later, Anabaptist Christians during the Reformation refuse to bow to rulers in Europe. Some people out of conscience today refuse nationalistic rituals. Mordecai's refusal changes the game of honor – and changes the meaning of the game. Mordecai poses a question: "What are we really doing?" Mordecai acts out a new idea: "All of us are the same before God." Even with a well-won position to stand, it can be costly to stand up and say "No" to such pride and power that turns so easily to blinding rage.

Jesus, help me follow you. Holy Spirit, breath within me the courage to speak and the courage to stand, the courage and wisdom to know when it is important to set a course that is different from the sins of the world around me.

Fr. David Gortner is the Rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Coeur d'Alene, ID.

Day 13 – Wednesday, March 11

Scapegoating

Esther 3: 5-11

⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or show him respect, he was filled with rage. ⁶ He had learned of Mordecai's nationality, so he decided it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he looked for a way to destroy all the Jews throughout the entire empire of Xerxes.

⁷ So in the month of April, during the twelfth year of King Xerxes' reign, lots were cast in Haman's presence (the lots were called *purim*) to determine the best day and month to take action. And the day selected was March 7, nearly a year later. ⁸ Then Haman approached King Xerxes and said, "There is a certain race of people scattered through all the provinces of your empire who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their laws are different from those of any other people, and they refuse to obey the laws of the king. So it is not in the king's interest to let them live. ⁹ If it please the king, issue a decree that they be destroyed, and I will give 10,000 large sacks of silver to the government administrators to be deposited in the royal treasury." ¹⁰ The king agreed, confirming his decision by removing his signet ring from his finger and giving it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ The king said, "The money and the people are both yours to do with as you see fit."

Devotional Commentary: Haman's scapegoating of all the Jews in the empire because of Mordecai is pure evil, and more common than we'd like to admit. Those who first heard the story of Esther may have recalled the tradition of scapegoating on the Day of Atonement. The Gospel of John (John 11:47-53) applies Hamon's reasoning to the scapegoating of Jesus by the chief priests and Pharisees'. What current examples of scapegoating are you reminded of? Has anger ever led you to scapegoat another person or group of people?

Show me, Lord, when I see my own sins in those around me, and guide me to take responsibility for my own actions. Amen.

Grant MacLean, retired pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church, active member of Trinity Lutheran Church

Day 14 – Thursday, March 12

Different. And God Saw it Was Good.

Esther 3: 11-15

¹¹ The king said, "The money and the people are both yours to do with as you see fit."

¹² So on April 17 the king's secretaries were summoned, and a decree was written exactly as Haman dictated. It was sent to the king's highest officers, the governors of the respective provinces, and the nobles of each province in their own scripts and languages. The decree was written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with the king's signet ring. ¹³ Dispatches were sent by swift messengers into all the provinces of the empire, giving the order that all Jews-- young and old, including women and children-- must be killed, slaughtered, and annihilated on a single day. This was scheduled to happen on March 7 of the next year. The property of the Jews would be given to those who killed them. ¹⁴ A copy of this decree was to be issued as law in every province and proclaimed to all peoples, so that they would be ready to do their duty on the appointed day.

¹⁵ At the king's command, the decree went out by swift messengers, and it was also proclaimed in the fortress of Susa. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa fell into confusion.

Devotional Commentary: The proclamations sent by King Xerxes and sealed by the imprint of his signet ring sent shock waves throughout the empire. The signet ring made the order irrevocable. This decree was more than just a suggestion or scare tactic to get people in line. No one is crying wolf here. This is law. And the Jew must die! Why we ask? Many reasons can be given but perhaps the simplest answer is that the Jew was different! Different scares us. Especially when it is a person or a people we don't know, are unfamiliar with, who speak a different language, wear different clothes, and worship a different god. Different makes us question a person's motives, beliefs and loyalties. Different makes us shut down, withdraw, distrust and fear. It closes us off to each other and ourselves. Yet we are different. Each of us, different. Different is our strength, our uniqueness, our identity, our hope. Different I want to believe is something God still sees as good. Something we need not kill.

O Lord replace in me the fear and distrust of that which is different.

Pastor Mike Grabenstein, ELCA retired

Day 15 – Friday, March 13

First Response to Bad News

Esther 3:15 – 4:3

^{3:15} At the king's command, the decree went out by swift messengers, and it was also proclaimed in the fortress of Susa. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa fell into confusion.

^{4:1} When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail. ² He went as far as the gate of the palace, for no one was allowed to enter the palace gate while wearing clothes of mourning. ³ And as news of the king's decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

Devotional Commentary: Notice what Mordecai does when he finds out that all of his people will be killed! I find it fascinating that the first response to terrible news and an awful decision by a tyrant is an act of repentance and lament. Putting on burlap and ashes was an act of repentance. When you and I are confronted by terrible news or an awful decision by those in power, we often cry foul, we demand justice, we threaten some action. In a sense we demand that others repent. In this short Bible reading we see the Chosen People's first response: it is one of humility and deep emotion.

God save us from arrogance and our own self-importance, giving us the spirit of your Chosen ones.

Pastor Bob Albing – Lutheran Church of the Master, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Week 3 – Family Activity – Bake Cookies with a Story

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures God gives the Jewish people ceremonies, habits, songs, and holidays that they can use to remember their history and God’s faithfulness throughout that history. Because of this Jews have always had a gift for coming up with new ways to remember important things.

Hamantaschen, or Haman’s Hats, are cookies that help tell the story of Esther. These fun triangular, fruit-filled cookies are fun to make and delicious to boot. There are countless great recipes for these cookies on the internet find one that looks good to you and give it a whirl.

Here are some sites that tell the story of these cookies and might help you use them to share Esther with Kids:

<https://time.com/purim-history-hamantaschen/> - an article about the history of Hamantaschen

<https://youtu.be/OeB4iSfSoig> - A Sesame street video about Hamantaschen

https://www.chabad.org/kids/article_cdo/aid/354749/jewish/Purim.htm - Kids’ Purim Activities

Day 16 – Saturday, March 14

Making the Hard Choices

Esther 4:3-8

³ And as news of the king's decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

⁴ When Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the burlap, but he refused it. ⁵ Then Esther sent for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was troubling him and why he was in mourning. ⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the square in front of the palace gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people.

Devotional Commentary: Have you ever had to address a situation that was uncomfortable or could potentially cause offense but you knew the right thing to do was address it? What was your initial reaction? By nature I’m passive when faced with situations like this. My preference is to ignore and hope things work out for the best. But the Lord hasn’t let me respond that way for some time now – and I’m most grateful. I believe He keeps us in that ‘uncomfortable’ state to see if we’ll be obedient and so we have to be dependent on Him.

Heavenly Father, what a good Father and Teacher you are. Help us to be bold when boldness is required but also to always be dependent on You - especially when we have to address issues that are uncomfortable.

Bill Miller – Pastor at Beth Shalom Messianic Fellowship in Post Falls, ID

Sunday, March 15 – No devotions on Sundays

Day 17 – Monday, March 16

Be Not Afraid

Esther 4:8-12

⁸ Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. ⁹ So Hathach returned to Esther with Mordecai's message. ¹⁰ Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: ¹¹ "All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days." ¹² So Hathach gave Esther's message to Mordecai.

Devotional Commentary: Esther is told about the plot to obliterate the Jewish people and her adoptive father asks her to do something about it. While Esther was probably flooded with a multitude of mixed emotions, one must think that fear was chief among them. Fear that her people were to be annihilated, fear that Mordecai would be killed, fear that her secret identity as a Jew would be discovered, fear that if she approached the king her life would be forfeit. There was much to be genuinely afraid of. People of deep faith, and steadfast strength are not immune to fear. Fear of dangers that threaten us can help us make wise choices and guide our moving forward, but this is only true if we invite God to enter our fear and help us move through it. Only in recognizing our fears can we accept God's invitation to "be not afraid." (Ezekiel 2: 5-7)

Lord of Life, show me where fear is informing my decisions and give me faith to know that you are with me even in the most frightful of situations.

Pastor Matt Erickson – Calvary Lutheran Church, Post Falls, ID

Day 18 – Tuesday, March 17

We are in a Time Such as This

Esther 4:12-17

¹² So Hathach gave Esther's message to Mordecai. ¹³ Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. ¹⁴ If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?" ¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." ¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Devotional Commentary: What oppresses us in our culture? Has God put us, too, where we are for such a time as this? Through us, God can save many, if we will let Him. We just need to follow Esther's example. Choose

wisdom by listening to the godly counsel of others. (Seek it, if we don't have it.) Choose holy boldness. But before we act, pray and (for big decisions) fast. This Lenten season, let's give up doing nothing about something important.

Lord, give us holy boldness in what we face, but help us remember You in prayer & fasting before we act.

Bill Stonebraker – Pastor at Faith Presbyterian Church in Hayden, ID

Day 19– Wednesday, March 18

Donning our new robes of Salvation

Esther 4:17 – 5:4

^{4:17} So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

^{5:1} On the third day of the fast, Esther put on her royal robes and entered the inner court of the palace, just across from the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne, facing the entrance. ² When he saw Queen Esther standing there in the inner court, he welcomed her and held out the gold scepter to her. So Esther approached and touched the end of the scepter. ³ Then the king asked her, "What do you want, Queen Esther? What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!" ⁴ And Esther replied, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet I have prepared for the king."

Devotional Commentary: The "third day" is the first day of Passover. Like Esther, Israel's salvation was dependent to take off her old garments and don her royal robes, waiting for the King to impart his scepter. By extending out the scepter, the king demonstrated that he was taking Esther (and Israel) under his protection. Passover teaches us to get rid of our sinful garments and put on priestly robes. *"For He has clothed me with garments of salvation." "For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God's holy people."* While we are newly robed, our King will *"protect us from the Evil One."*

Father, remind me to wear my new garments of good deeds to please my King.

Pastor John Popp – Messianic Jewish Pastor

Day 20—Thursday, March 19

What do you want?

Esther 4:17-5:4

^{4:17} So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

^{5:1} On the third day of the fast, Esther put on her royal robes and entered the inner court of the palace, just across from the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne, facing the entrance. ² When he saw Queen Esther standing there in the inner court, he welcomed her and held out the gold scepter to her. So

Esther approached and touched the end of the scepter. ³ Then the king asked her, "What do you want, Queen Esther? What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!" ⁴ And Esther replied, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet I have prepared for the king."

Devotional Commentary: The king asked Esther, "What do you want?" A simple question, one that we have asked and had asked of us countless times I am sure. Jesus' first words in John's Gospel are, "What are you looking for?", the same question the king asks Esther, we could, perhaps, say that is the question that is at the heart of faith journey as well. What are you looking for? Where is this season of Lent guiding you? What do you hope to learn about yourself, about Jesus, about what God is up to in the world? Esther had the courage to answer, do we?

God give us the courage to voice what it is we are looking for...to your glory!

Pastor Dan Forsgren, Trinity Lutheran Church, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Day 21– Friday, March 20

Courage Is Not Enough

Esther 5: 4-8

⁴ And Esther replied, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet I have prepared for the king." ⁵ The king turned to his attendants and said, "Tell Haman to come quickly to a banquet, as Esther has requested." So the king and Haman went to Esther's banquet. ⁶ And while they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, "Now tell me what you really want. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!" ⁷ Esther replied, "This is my request and deepest wish. ⁸ If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request and do what I ask, please come with Haman tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for you. Then I will explain what this is all about."

Devotional Commentary: Esther is not Vashti. Esther develops a strong relationship with the king, moves smoothly, bides her time. The "cardinal virtues" – named by St. Thomas Aquinas as prudence, justice, temperance, and courage – grow within us by God's grace, as beacons to guide us as we follow Christ's calling in the complexity of the world around us. Esther grows in prudence (wise and savvy discretion) as she moves in her world to defend her people. Early Christians needed prudence when hunted in Rome. People daring to protect Jews during Nazi oppression needed prudence. Courage alone is not enough in the face of evil.

Oh Holy Spirit, give me not only courage to stand for what is right, but also prudence to know when and how to stand and move with wisdom. In Jesus' name.

Fr. David Gortner is the Rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Coeur d'Alene, ID.

Week 4 – Family Activity – Watch a Vegtastic Video

Watch the Veggie Tales film *Esther-the Girl who became Queen*. This 30-minute video tells the story of Esther in a way that is easily accessible to young kiddos while entertaining for the whole family. It also is a great conversation starter. Use the video as a steppingstone for talking to your kids about times in our lives when we need courage. Ultimately courage comes from God.

Unfortunately, someone has gobbled up the streaming rights for all the classic Veggie Tales films. The DVD can be ordered from Amazon, rented from Video Theater in Post Falls & CDA, or possibly borrowed from your church, or find it on YouTube. It's worth the effort. Who doesn't like a Green Onion Heroine (or is she a leek?).

Day 22– Saturday, March 21

All This is Worth Nothing

Esther 5: 8-14

⁸ If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request and do what I ask, please come with Haman tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for you. Then I will explain what this is all about."

⁹ Haman was a happy man as he left the banquet! But when he saw Mordecai sitting at the palace gate, not standing up or trembling nervously before him, Haman became furious. ¹⁰ However, he restrained himself and went on home. Then Haman gathered together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, ¹¹ and boasted to them about his great wealth and his many children. He bragged about the honors the king had given him and how he had been promoted over all the other nobles and officials. ¹² Then Haman added, "And that's not all! Queen Esther invited only me and the king himself to the banquet she prepared for us. And she has invited me to dine with her and the king again tomorrow!" ¹³ Then he added, "But this is all worth nothing as long as I see Mordecai the Jew just sitting there at the palace gate." ¹⁴ So Haman's wife, Zeresh, and all his friends suggested, "Set up a sharpened pole that stands seventy-five feet tall, and in the morning ask the king to impale Mordecai on it. When this is done, you can go on your merry way to the banquet with the king." This pleased Haman, and he ordered the pole set up.

Devotional Commentary: Esther seems a fable of uncontrollable rage: that of the king and especially of Haman. His life is first diminished and then ended when he allows his anger to take over his life. Haman's fate is sealed when he takes his wife's advice to erect a sharpened pole on which to impale Mordecai. We all *know* what's going to happen. The danger of our own anger is worth some reflection today. What are the possible – or even probable – outcomes of a grudge you bear if left to fester? Be curious rather than self-condemning.

Set me free, Lord, from my anger, so I might enjoy the blessings my anger has eclipsed.

Grant MacLean, retired pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church, active member of Trinity Lutheran Church

Sunday, March 22 – No devotions on Sundays

Day 23 – Monday, March 23

Timing is everything!

Esther 5:14 – 6:4

^{5:14} So Haman's wife, Zeresh, and all his friends suggested, "Set up a sharpened pole that stands seventy-five feet tall, and in the morning ask the king to impale Mordecai on it. When this is done, you can go on your merry way to the banquet with the king." This pleased Haman, and he ordered the pole set up.

^{6:1} That night the king had trouble sleeping, so he ordered an attendant to bring the book of the history of his reign so it could be read to him. ² In those records he discovered an account of how Mordecai had exposed the plot of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the eunuchs who guarded the door to the king's private quarters. They had plotted to assassinate King Xerxes. ³ "What reward or recognition did we ever give Mordecai for this?" the king asked. His attendants replied, "Nothing has been done for him." ⁴ "Who is that in the outer court?" the king inquired. As it happened, Haman had just arrived in the outer court of the palace to ask the king to impale Mordecai on the pole he had prepared.

Devotional Commentary: It is said that "timing is everything." If Mordecai hadn't alerted the king to the plot against his life AND, if some unknown scribe hadn't written down this saving deed in the official record book, AND if King Xerxes hadn't called for the royal record book for a little night reading, AND if King Xerxes, being a benevolent and just man hadn't asked about rewarding Mordechai AND if Haman hadn't walked into the king's chambers when he did, this story, not to mention Mordecai's life would have had a different ending. Xerxes is now not only Mordechai's king he is his savior too. Timing IS everything! Sometime the difference between life and death. We are told, at the right time God sent a king and savior for all the condemned, broken and practically impaled Mordechai's of this world. Timing is everything and God's is impeccable. He comes just when we need him the most. Good for Mordechai. Good for us.

O God in your good time, rescue us from all that is evil within us, and in our world.

Pastor Mike Grabenstein, ELCA retired

Day 24– Tuesday, March 24

Be Careful What You Wish For

Esther 6: 4-9

⁴ "Who is that in the outer court?" the king inquired. As it happened, Haman had just arrived in the outer court of the palace to ask the king to impale Mordecai on the pole he had prepared. ⁵ So the attendants replied to the king, "Haman is out in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered. ⁶ So Haman came in, and the king said, "What should I do to honor a man who truly pleases me?" Haman thought to himself, "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?" ⁷ So he replied, "If the king wishes to honor someone, ⁸ he should bring out one of the king's own royal robes, as well as a horse that the king himself has ridden-- one with a royal emblem on its head. ⁹ Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. And let him see that the man whom the king wishes to honor is dressed in the king's robes and led

through the city square on the king's horse. Have the official shout as they go, 'This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!'"

Devotional Commentary: Poor Haman, he is so full of himself that he thinks the king is preparing to honor him. When, in fact, Mordecai will be the one so honored. There is no humility in Haman's advice to the king. Haman will end up regretting his words. Have there been times when you have regretted your words? Have there been times when you wish you had not been so full of yourself? Of course, as we have seen throughout the book of Esther, God can even use the sins of others to bring about His holy will. Mordecai will be honored.

God, thank you for bringing good out of evil, light out of darkness, order out of chaos, in the world and in our lives.

Pastor Bob Albing – Lutheran Church of the Master, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Day 25– Wednesday, March 25

Be Humble or be Humbled

Esther 6: 9-12

⁹ Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. And let him see that the man whom the king wishes to honor is dressed in the king's robes and led through the city square on the king's horse. Have the official shout as they go, 'This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!'"
¹⁰ "Excellent!" the king said to Haman. "Quick! Take the robes and my horse, and do just as you have said for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the gate of the palace. Leave out nothing you have suggested!" ¹¹ So Haman took the robes and put them on Mordecai, placed him on the king's own horse, and led him through the city square, shouting, "This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!"

¹² Afterward Mordecai returned to the palace gate, but Haman hurried home dejected and completely humiliated.

Devotional Commentary: Have you seen those YouTube clips of the runners who start to celebrate as they're coming to the finish line only to end up coming in 2nd place? You can see on their faces the expressions of joy one moment and the next utter confusion and almost depression. Which is better? Living a life of humility or being humbled by circumstances beyond your control? Micah 6:8 says "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Father in heaven, remind us not to be arrogant in any situation but to walk humbly (teachable) before You and before mankind.

Bill Miller – Pastor at Beth Shalom Messianic Fellowship in Post Falls, ID

Day 26 – Thursday, March 26

Change Course Already!

Esther 6: 12-14

¹² Afterward Mordecai returned to the palace gate, but Haman hurried home dejected and completely humiliated. ¹³ When Haman told his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends what had happened, his wise advisers and his wife said, "Since Mordecai-- this man who has humiliated you-- is of Jewish birth, you will never succeed in your plans against him. It will be fatal to continue opposing him."

¹⁴ While they were still talking, the king's eunuchs arrived and quickly took Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared.

Devotional Commentary: Haman has dug himself into quite the hole. It is clear that his plot is not in-line with the Kings will. His wife, who was previously encouraging him in his villainy, has seen the light and tells him that his plans are doomed. What if Haman had relented, confesses and seeks forgiveness from Mordecai and the King? Can he let go of pride, resentment, and bigotry and fear? So often when we realize that we have gone in a poor direction we allow our pride and resentment to prevent us from changing course. God loves a humble heart and is eager to forgive and guide us through the messes we make, but will we accept his grace? God's saving love is given freely, but without following God's ways our experiencing of that love is greatly diminished.

Merciful Savior, help me to turn away from the poor choices I am making. Help me to trust your ways and follow your will in all that I do.

Pastor Matt Erickson – Calvary Lutheran Church, Post Falls, ID

Day 27– Friday, March 27

Wait and Fear Not

Esther 6:14 – 7:4

¹⁴ While they were still talking, the king's eunuchs arrived and quickly took Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared.

^{7:1} So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet. ² On this second occasion, while they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "Tell me what you want, Queen Esther. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!" ³ Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request, I ask that my life and the lives of my people will be spared. ⁴ For my people and I have been sold to those who would kill, slaughter, and annihilate us. If we had merely been sold as slaves, I could remain quiet, for that would be too trivial a matter to warrant disturbing the king."

Devotional Commentary: Esther had feared entering the king's presence. But he had done more than grant her request, to attend a banquet. Thinking she sought wealth, He had offered as much as half his kingdom.

Instead, she'd invited her enemy to a second dinner. Had she accepted the king's offer of wealth, maybe she could save herself. But her people? Lost. Instead, she waited on God's timing. Then asked for her heart's desire—God's best. When have we been tempted to settle for the good, instead of God's best? Don't settle. Keep seeking the Father. Wait on His timing. And His best.

Lord, set my heart on Your will, in Your time, knowing that You want more for me than I can ask or imagine.

Bill Stonebraker – Pastor at Faith Presbyterian Church in Hayden, ID

Week 5 – Family Activity – Talk about Bullies

Read the story of Esther from your favorite children's bible. If you don't have this story in your children's bible, try this short YouTube video which tells the story of Esther in a fun way: https://youtu.be/SaS_ePAjCvk

Talk ask your kiddos: 1) What it is about Haman that makes him a bully? 2) Do you know any bullies? How did Esther and Mordecai deal with Haman the Bully? How can we deal with Bullies? If you are looking for more Bible based conversation about bullies for kiddos you might try this web-page:

<https://www.christianitycove.com/childrens-church-devotional-bullies/2277/>

Day 28– Saturday, March 28

The Inconvenient Truth

Esther 7: 4-10

⁴ For my people and I have been sold to those who would kill, slaughter, and annihilate us. If we had merely been sold as slaves, I could remain quiet, for that would be too trivial a matter to warrant disturbing the king." ⁵ "Who would do such a thing?" King Xerxes demanded. "Who would be so presumptuous as to touch you?" ⁶ Esther replied, "This wicked Haman is our adversary and our enemy." Haman grew pale with fright before the king and queen. ⁷ Then the king jumped to his feet in a rage and went out into the palace garden. Haman, however, stayed behind to plead for his life with Queen Esther, for he knew that the king intended to kill him. ⁸ In despair he fell on the couch where Queen Esther was reclining, just as the king was returning from the palace garden. The king exclaimed, "Will he even assault the queen right here in the palace, before my very eyes?" And as soon as the king spoke, his attendants covered Haman's face, signaling his doom. ⁹ Then Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said, "Haman has set up a sharpened pole that stands seventy-five feet tall in his own courtyard. He intended to use it to impale Mordecai, the man who saved the king from assassination." "Then impale Haman on it!" the king ordered. ¹⁰ So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.

Devotional Commentary: Had they merely been sold as slaves, Esther would not have objected. Why? Because the Torah states if they sin they will be sold to their enemies. But the decree was the complete extermination of the Jews, something the WORD never prophesied. Haman may be hanged but his decree of genocide against the Jews and believers is still alive today. The Hebrew word for "assault" is *lichvosh*, a military term

which means **to destroy and conquer**. There is still a decree against us from the Adversary who lurks to devour and kill us. The Adversary wants to separate the Believer's destiny separated from the Jewish people.

Father, remind me there is still in a battle in this world against the Jewish people, but let me intercede as Esther did to reveal the inconvenient truth that one day all Israel will be saved.

Pastor John Popp – Messianic Jewish Pastor

Sunday, March 29 – No devotions on Sundays

Day 29—Monday, March 30

Haman got the point!

Esther 7:10 – 8:2

^{7:10} So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.

^{8:1} On that same day King Xerxes gave the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Then Mordecai was brought before the king, for Esther had told the king how they were related. ² The king took off his signet ring-- which he had taken back from Haman-- and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed Mordecai to be in charge of Haman's property.

Devotional Commentary: Remember, this all happened to Haman because he, "was filled with rage" that Mordecai would not bow down to him. I read a short story once called, "Charlie the Tree Killer". It was about a man named Charlie who in his older age, became angry with the trees he had planted around his property in his youth. Irritated that they might outlive him, and adamant they would not, Charlie set to chopping down these trees. This continued for a few weeks, until, something happened, and a tree fell on Charlie, crushing his skull, killing him. Charlie's rage consumed him and ultimately was the cause of his demise; in a similar way, Haman's rage consumed him. In the end though, I think Haman got the point!

Lord help us to not be consumed by anger, but to give everything over to you.

Pastor Dan Forsgren, Trinity Lutheran Church, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Day 30– Tuesday, March 31

Love Means Tears

Esther 8: 2-6

² The king took off his signet ring-- which he had taken back from Haman-- and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed Mordecai to be in charge of Haman's property.

³Then Esther went again before the king, falling down at his feet and begging him with tears to stop the evil plot devised by Haman the Agagite against the Jews. ⁴ Again the king held out the gold scepter to Esther. So she rose and stood before him. ⁵ Esther said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor with him, and if he thinks it is right, and if I am pleasing to him, let there be a decree that reverses the orders of Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, who ordered that Jews throughout all the king's provinces should be destroyed. ⁶ For how can I endure to see my people and my family slaughtered and destroyed?"

Devotional Commentary: The time comes for Esther to make the fullest appeal, for all her people. She pours out her heart to Xerxes, pleading for the king to reverse a genocidal order. Esther is schooling Xerxes in what it means to care for those in lower positions. Where Xerxes, like many emperors and rulers, views the people beneath him as grass and weeds and cattle, Esther even as queen continues to see her people as beloved and dear to her. Jesus says even to love our enemies, not just our kin. Whom will you, I, love enough to plead with tears for?

*Jesus, Savior of All, you seek all of us with such amazing love, pouring out your life for us all.
Open my heart to seek, care for, and plead for others – even my enemies and those I have
never cared for. In your name and by your loving power.*

Fr. David Gortner is the Rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Coeur d'Alene, ID.

Day 31– Wednesday, April 1

Irrevocable

Esther 8: 6-8

⁶ For how can I endure to see my people and my family slaughtered and destroyed?" ⁷ Then King Xerxes said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "I have given Esther the property of Haman, and he has been impaled on a pole because he tried to destroy the Jews. ⁸ Now go ahead and send a message to the Jews in the king's name, telling them whatever you want, and seal it with the king's signet ring. But remember that whatever has already been written in the king's name and sealed with his signet ring can never be revoked."

Devotional Commentary: Again the king does not care what is sealed with his ring, as long as it is eternally binding. The result of the king's foolish decrees will be the loss of thousands of lives! Even the king himself cannot undo what has been written! How wonderful that our God is able to revoke what he has decreed, and to forgive the laws which have been broken! Is there a situation where you can follow God's example and forgive those who have broken your trust?

*Our Father, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,
namely.... Amen.*

Grant MacLean, retired pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church, active member of Trinity Lutheran Church

Day 32 – Thursday, April 2

A Blind World.

Esther 8: 8-13

⁸ Now go ahead and send a message to the Jews in the king's name, telling them whatever you want, and seal it with the king's signet ring. But remember that whatever has already been written in the king's name and sealed with his signet ring can never be revoked."

⁹ So on June 25 the king's secretaries were summoned, and a decree was written exactly as Mordecai dictated. It was sent to the Jews and to the highest officers, the governors, and the nobles of all the 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. The decree was written in the scripts and languages of all the peoples of the empire, including that of the Jews. ¹⁰ The decree was written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with the king's signet ring. Mordecai sent the dispatches by swift messengers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king's service. ¹¹ The king's decree gave the Jews in every city authority to unite to defend their lives. They were allowed to kill, slaughter, and annihilate anyone of any nationality or province who might attack them or their children and wives, and to take the property of their enemies. ¹² The day chosen for this event throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes was March 7 of the next year. ¹³ A copy of this decree was to be issued as law in every province and proclaimed to all peoples, so that the Jews would be ready to take revenge on their enemies on the appointed day.

Reading this account of the decree affording Jews full authority to “kill, slaughter and annihilate anyone of any nationality or province who might attack them” seems both counterproductive and a way to only guarantee revenge at some later date. Call me naive but haven’t we learned this “getting even” mentality never has a good ending. No one wins. Genocide kills more than our enemy. It kills us too. Mahatma Gandhi said something about this in a speech one time, when he said, “An eye for an eye and soon the whole world is blind.” Too much talk by the leaders of our world today is centered on overcoming violence with more violence. Tit for tat policies of eradicating that and those someone has called “evil” leads us down a forward path guaranteeing for our children and our children’s children’s children an even darker world and blindness deeper than our own.

O Lord, only in your love and forgiveness do I know though blind now I see.

Pastor Mike Grabenstein, ELCA retired

Day 33– Friday, April 3

Darkest Night, Brightest Dawn

Esther 8: 13-17

¹³ A copy of this decree was to be issued as law in every province and proclaimed to all peoples, so that the Jews would be ready to take revenge on their enemies on the appointed day. ¹⁴ So urged on by the king's command, the messengers rode out swiftly on fast horses bred for the king's service. The same decree was also proclaimed in the fortress of Susa.

¹⁵ Then Mordecai left the king's presence, wearing the royal robe of blue and white, the great crown of gold, and an outer cloak of fine linen and purple. And the people of Susa celebrated the new decree. ¹⁶ The Jews were filled with joy and gladness and were honored everywhere. ¹⁷ In every province and city, wherever the king's decree arrived, the Jews rejoiced and had a great celebration and declared a public festival and holiday. And many of the people of the land became Jews themselves, for they feared what the Jews might do to them.

Devotional Commentary: The Jews of the empire were saved ! They were filled with joy and gladness. The king's first proclamation caused by his anger and ego caused great lamentation among the Jews across the land. His second proclamation caused by a sense of justice and mercy caused great joy and gladness among the Jews across his land. You know in your own life that what is done or said out of anger or ego, out of fear or arrogance often leads to anger, fear or sadness on the part of others. What is done or said out of justice and mercy often brings joy and relief.

God help us always in our words and in our actions to be moved by justice and mercy, as you are.

Pastor Bob Albing – Lutheran Church of the Master, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Day 34– Saturday, April 4

He is Our Victory

Esther 8:17 – 9:4

¹⁷ In every province and city, wherever the king's decree arrived, the Jews rejoiced and had a great celebration and declared a public festival and holiday. And many of the people of the land became Jews themselves, for they feared what the Jews might do to them.

^{9:1} So on March 7 the two decrees of the king were put into effect. On that day, the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but quite the opposite happened. It was the Jews who overpowered their enemies. ² The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the king's provinces to attack anyone who tried to harm them. But no one could make a stand against them, for everyone was afraid of them. ³ And all the nobles of the provinces, the highest officers, the governors, and the royal officials helped the Jews for fear of Mordecai. ⁴ For Mordecai had been promoted in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces as he became more and more powerful.

Devotional Commentary: I love to root for the underdog (unless they're playing the Seahawks). It's always exciting to see them end up with the victory – their faces lit up with joy and sometimes disbelief. I especially love it when God causes the underdog to come out victorious. More and more in our society it seems that we're becoming the underdogs. There is great contempt towards the things and people of God. But again, He is ALWAYS FAITHFUL! Let us stay the course so we can say with Paul "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Abba Hashamayim (Father in Heaven), may we honor your name in everything we do and by running the race with expectations of victory over our enemies.

Bill Miller – Pastor at Beth Shalom Messianic Fellowship in Post Falls, ID

Sunday, April 5 – No devotions on Sundays

Day 35 – Monday, April 6

Sometimes the Good-Guys are Wrong

Esther 9: 4-12

⁴ For Mordecai had been promoted in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces as he became more and more powerful. ⁵ So the Jews went ahead on the appointed day and struck down their enemies with the sword. They killed and annihilated their enemies and did as they pleased with those who hated them. ⁶ In the fortress of Susa itself, the Jews killed 500 men.

⁷ They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹ Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha-- ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not take any plunder.

¹¹ That very day, when the king was informed of the number of people killed in the fortress of Susa, ¹² he called for Queen Esther. He said, "The Jews have killed 500 men in the fortress of Susa alone, as well as Haman's ten sons. If they have done that here, what has happened in the rest of the provinces? But now, what more do you want? It will be granted to you; tell me and I will do it."

Devotional Commentary: Sometimes when we read scripture we treat the characters we read about like heroes and villains in a novel. When we do this, we often assume that everything the "bad-guys" do is wrong, and everything the "good-guys" do is right. In a narrative like Esther what we are given is an honest description of the people as they are. I believe that the Jewish response to Haman's plot to destroy them was outside of God's will. It may have been justified, it may have temporarily provided more security to Jewish people, and it certainly caused even the King to fear these strange Hebrews. But are these purposes in line with God's call it represented choosing retribution over restoration. We will never know for sure how God feels about this outbreak of violence, as the Bible never praises or condemns the slaughter of these "enemies of the Jews," but it is always safe for us to look critically at the actions of Biblical characters, even when they are portrayed as the heroes.

Redeeming King, your love and care for me is unending and unfathomable, help me to seek restoration and wholeness in the world around me.

Pastor Matt Erickson – Calvary Lutheran Church, Post Falls, ID

Day 36– Tuesday, April 7

Vengeance is God's Business

Esther 9: 12-15

¹² He called for Queen Esther. He said, "The Jews have killed 500 men in the fortress of Susa alone, as well as Haman's ten sons. If they have done that here, what has happened in the rest of the provinces? But now, what more do you want? It will be granted to you; tell me and I will do it." ¹³ Esther responded, "If it please

the king, give the Jews in Susa permission to do again tomorrow as they have done today, and let the bodies of Haman's ten sons be impaled on a pole." ¹⁴ So the king agreed, and the decree was announced in Susa. And they impaled the bodies of Haman's ten sons. ¹⁵ Then the Jews at Susa gathered together on March 8 and killed 300 more men, and again they took no plunder.

Devotional Commentary: Haman's punishment fit his crime. He tried to annihilate God's chosen people. Esther sought God's will and courageously stepped forward. And the Jews were saved. Instead, Haman's life was annihilated. The Jews could've taken plunder. Why didn't they? It wasn't about revenge on an ancestral enemy. It was about survival. God gave them victory. So, to God alone belongs the gain. And notice: Esther couldn't and didn't take vengeance personally. She had to pray for God to answer through the king. Leave vengeance to God. He alone can see what's on our hearts. And He alone can mix perfect justice with grace.

Lord, help me to forgive. When I must, help me to pray for justice while leaving vengeance to you.

Bill Stonebraker – Pastor at Faith Presbyterian Church in Hayden, ID

Day 37– Wednesday, April 8

It's Hard to kill the hatred against the Jews

Esther 9:15-19

¹⁵ Then the Jews at Susa gathered together on March 8 and killed 300 more men, and again they took no plunder.

¹⁶ Meanwhile, the other Jews throughout the king's provinces had gathered together to defend their lives. They gained relief from all their enemies, killing 75,000 of those who hated them. But they did not take any plunder. ¹⁷ This was done throughout the provinces on March 7, and on March 8 they rested, celebrating their victory with a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁸ (The Jews at Susa killed their enemies on March 7 and again on March 8, then rested on March 9, making that their day of feasting and gladness.) ¹⁹ So to this day, rural Jews living in remote villages celebrate an annual festival and holiday on the appointed day in late winter, when they rejoice and send gifts of food to each other.

Devotional: The Adversary has had a decree against the Jewish people since he knew that Salvation (Yeshua) would be given as a light to the nations and a glory to Israel. Yeshua is coming soon, while Iran's (Persia) decree of genocide against the Jews continually threatens Israel. Another Haman will transcend time to start its final battle against God's people. We must stay alert! Watch out for our great enemy, the devil. But the evildoers who come against us to devour our flesh, our foes and enemies will stumble and fall. Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Father, strengthen me in my diligence to stay alert to hate evil and to protect the Jewish people when Anti-Semitism shows its face.

Pastor John Popp – Messianic Jewish Pastor

Day 38—Maundy Thursday, April 9

Sorrow into gladness.

Esther 9: 19 - 26

⁹ So to this day, rural Jews living in remote villages celebrate an annual festival and holiday on the appointed day in late winter, when they rejoice and send gifts of food to each other.

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to the Jews near and far, throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes, ²¹ calling on them to celebrate an annual festival on these two days. ²² He told them to celebrate these days with feasting and gladness and by giving gifts of food to each other and presents to the poor. This would commemorate a time when the Jews gained relief from their enemies, when their sorrow was turned into gladness and their mourning into joy.

²³ So the Jews accepted Mordecai's proposal and adopted this annual custom. ²⁴ Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews, had plotted to crush and destroy them on the date determined by casting lots (the lots were called *purim*). ²⁵ But when Esther came before the king, he issued a decree causing Haman's evil plot to backfire, and Haman and his sons were impaled on a sharpened pole. ²⁶ That is why this celebration is called Purim, because it is the ancient word for casting lots. So because of Mordecai's letter and because of what they had experienced.

Imagine if things would have worked out against Esther and her people. Instead, we are told they would commemorate the time with feasting, and giving of gifts of food, remembering when their sorrow was turned to gladness. I would think while all these events were playing out Esther and Mordecai kept the what ifs at the forefront of their minds. This Lenten journey we embark on each year, this time we look inward and think about our own lives; we know how this story ends, we know that with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our own sorrow has been turned into gladness, and we know life!

Gracious God, thank you for the gift you have given us in your Son, through whom we know life!

Pastor Dan Forsgren, Trinity Lutheran Church, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Day 39— Good Friday, April 10

Safety First – For All

Esther 9: 26-32

²⁶ That is why this celebration is called Purim, because it is the ancient word for casting lots. So because of Mordecai's letter and because of what they had experienced, ²⁷ the Jews throughout the realm agreed to inaugurate this tradition and to pass it on to their descendants and to all who became Jews. They declared

they would never fail to celebrate these two prescribed days at the appointed time each year. ²⁸ These days would be remembered and kept from generation to generation and celebrated by every family throughout the provinces and cities of the empire. This Festival of Purim would never cease to be celebrated among the Jews, nor would the memory of what happened ever die out among their descendants.

²⁹ Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote another letter putting the queen's full authority behind Mordecai's letter to establish the Festival of Purim. ³⁰ Letters wishing peace and security were sent to the Jews throughout the 127 provinces of the empire of Xerxes. ³¹ These letters established the Festival of Purim-- an annual celebration of these days at the appointed time, decreed by both Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther. (The people decided to observe this festival, just as they had decided for themselves and their descendants to establish the times of fasting and mourning.) ³² So the command of Esther confirmed the practices of Purim, and it was all written down in the records.

Devotional Commentary: Purim is a Jewish religious festival that, every year, protests against the abusive powers of rulers in this world and claims God's power to move through human hearts to set things right. Abraham Maslow in his hierarchy of human needs saw how some higher needs cannot be met if most basic needs are not met. Growing in love and in strength of being won't happen when there is no safety, no food, no shelter. In James 2:16, we are reminded, "If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" Esther uses her position to secure lasting safety for her people. Who today needs our help against cruelty, hunger, or the cold?

Jesus, open my eyes, heart, and will to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, defend the helpless, care for the sick and the prisoner – for that is where you are, and where I will meet you. Amen.

Fr. David Gortner is the Rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Coeur d'Alene, ID.

Week 6 – Family Activity – Observe Holy Week

Sometimes we think telling our kiddos the stories of Jesus being betrayed, and executed, is too heavy for children. These are stories that are uncomfortable, but it is this discomfort that helps kids understand the fullness of God's love. In this week before Easter consider attending Maundy Thursday and Good Friday worship services at your church. These tend to be somber, but experiential services that children find fascinating and can relate to in ways that surprise us.

As you talk about Jesus, and his love, remind children that Jesus is Jewish just like Esther. God used, Esther and other every-day heroes like her, to keep his promise to bring Jesus to us. God uses every-day regular people to keep his promises even today.

Day 40 – Holy Saturday, April 11

Endings?

Esther 9:32 – 10:3

^{9:32} So the command of Esther confirmed the practices of Purim, and it was all written down in the records.

^{10:1} King Xerxes imposed a tribute throughout his empire, even to the distant coastlands. ² His great achievements and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king had promoted, are recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Media and Persia*. ³ Mordecai the Jew became the prime minister, with authority next to that of King Xerxes himself. He was very great among the Jews, who held him in high esteem, because he continued to work for the good of his people and to speak up for the welfare of all their descendants.

Devotional Commentary: The last verses of the book suggest a “happily ever after” sort of epilogue to the story. It’s nothing like the ending of Jesus” we commemorate on Good Friday. Our Lenten journey began with the reminder, “From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return.” It ends with the explanation of the feast of Purim, the details of Hamon’s success, and the cross. How is your personal story woven into the traditions of our holy-days, the details of your daily life, and the finality of the cross?

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

Grant MacLean, retired pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church, active member of Trinity Lutheran Church

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