

SCRIPTURE READING

INTRO: Our scripture reading this morning is taken from the book of Esther, Chapter 4, verses 1-17. The Hebrew people have been colonized and have been scattered throughout the empire. An orphaned girl named Esther, under the care of her elder cousin Mordecai, manages to rise up to the status of queen within the empire. Mordecai had advised her to keep a low profile about her race and play the role of a submissive woman in order to survive. But now their people have come under genocidal threat because of a madman named: Haman, 2nd in command to the king. Queen Esther must decide whether she will continue to hide behind her gender and marginalized race, or rise up to redefine her identity as a woman and a Jew. Listen:

Esther 4. 1-17: When Mordecai learned all that had been done by Haman with his murderous plans against the Jews, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry.

²He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. ³In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them. ⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication and entreat him for her people.

⁹Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, ¹¹'All the king's servants

know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden sceptre to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days.’¹² When they told Mordecai what Esther had said,¹³ Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, ‘Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews.’¹⁴ For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.’¹⁵ Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai,¹⁶ ‘Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.’¹⁷ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. Amen.

We are listening, O God; **Speak to us!**