



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 13, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for being an active presence in my life. Help me to notice the ways you are with me in ways big and small. May your presence give me courage to say “yes!” to opportunities that make a difference in the world. And guide me, dear God, into community and relationships that embody and practice your great love. Amen.

Monday, August 14

Scripture: Esther 2:1-10, 16-20

Sometime later when King Ahasuerus was less angry, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what he had decided about her. So his young male servants said, “Let the king have a search made for beautiful young women who haven’t yet married. And let the king choose certain people in all the royal provinces to lead the search. Have them bring all the beautiful young women together to the fortified part of Susa, to the women’s house, to the care of Hegai the king’s eunuch in charge of the women so that he might provide beauty treatments for them. Let the young woman who pleases you the most take Vashti’s place as queen.” The king liked the plan and implemented it. Now there was a Jew in the fortified part of Susa whose name was Mordecai, Jair’s son. He came from the family line of Shimei and Kish; he was a Benjaminite. (Benjaminites had been taken into exile away from Jerusalem along with the group, which included Judah’s King Jeconiah, whom Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar exiled to Babylon.) Mordecai had been a father to Hadassah (that is, Esther), though she was really his cousin, because she had neither father nor mother. The girl had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at. When her parents died, Mordecai had taken her to be his daughter. When the king’s order and his new law became public, many young women were gathered into the fortified part of Susa under the care of Hegai. Esther was also taken to the palace to the care of Hegai, the one in charge of the women. The young woman pleased him and won his kindness. He quickly began her beauty treatments and gave her carefully chosen foods. He also gave her seven servants selected from among the palace servants and moved her and her servants into the nicest rooms in the women’s house. (Esther hadn’t told anyone her race and family background because Mordecai had ordered her not to.)

Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, to his own palace, in the tenth month (that is, the month of Tevet) in the seventh year of his rule. The king loved Esther more than all the

other women; she had won his love and his favor more than all the others. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her ruler in place of Vashti. The king held a magnificent, lavish feast, “the feast of Esther,” for all his officials and courtiers. He declared a public holiday for the provinces and gave out gifts with royal generosity. When they gathered the young women to the second women’s house, Mordecai was working for the king at the King’s Gate. Esther still wasn’t telling anyone her family background and race, just as Mordecai had ordered her. She continued to do what Mordecai said, just as she did when she was in his care.

Observation

Esther, we learn, was raised by her cousin Mordecai. Through descriptions, we learn that she is kind, captivating, and beautiful – inside and out. She seems to be one of those people that others are drawn to, as she brings out the best in others. Mordecai sees in Esther someone “with potential” as he helps her become Queen.

Application

Esther is a unique book in scripture, because God is not mentioned by name in its pages. And yet – the presence of God surrounds this story. Knowing what is coming in Esther’s story, we can already see God at work. God has given Esther compassion and kindness towards others around her; God has made her a person whom others trust. Each of these gifts are things that prepare her to lead “in such a time as this.” Are there times in your life where you have noticed God at work only in retrospect? What does that teach you about how God might be present to you today?

Prayer

Gracious God, even when we do not see or hear you, you are there. You are always at work in and through the lives of your people. Thank you for being faithful and persistent, giving me time to grow in understanding, faith, and love of you. Continue to be at work in my life and grant me the grace to see it. Amen.

Tuesday, August 15

Scripture: Esther 3:1-15

Sometime later, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite’s son, by promoting him above all the officials who worked with him. All the royal workers at the King’s Gate would kneel and bow facedown to Haman because the king had so ordered. But Mordecai didn’t kneel or bow down. So the royal workers at the King’s Gate said to Mordecai, “Why don’t you obey the king’s order?” Day after day they questioned him, but he paid no attention to them. So they let Haman know about it just to see whether or not Mordecai’s words would hold true. (He had told them that he was a Jew.) When Haman himself saw that Mordecai didn’t kneel or bow down to him, he became very angry. But he decided not to kill only Mordecai, for people had told him Mordecai’s race. Instead, he planned to wipe out all the Jews, Mordecai’s people, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. In the first month (that is, the month of Nisan) in the twelfth year of the rule of

King Ahasuerus, servants threw pur, namely, dice, in front of Haman to find the best day for his plan. They tried every day and every month, and the dice chose the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar). Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "A certain group of people exist in pockets among the other peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of everyone else, and they refuse to obey the king's laws. There's no good reason for the king to put up with them any longer. If the king wishes, let a written order be sent out to destroy them, and I will hand over ten thousand kikkars of silver to those in charge of the king's business. The silver can go into the king's treasuries." The king removed his royal ring from his finger and handed it to Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite's son, enemy of the Jews. The king said to Haman, "Both the money and the people are under your power. Do as you like with them." So in the first month, on the thirteenth day, royal scribes were summoned to write down everything that Haman ordered. The orders were for the king's rulers and the governors in charge of each province, as well as for the officials of each people. They wrote in the alphabet of each province and in the language of each people. They wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed the order with the king's royal ring. Fast runners were to take the order to all the provinces of the king. The order commanded people to wipe out, kill, and destroy all the Jews, both young and old, even women and little children. This was to happen on a single day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar). They were also to seize their property. A copy of the order was to become law in each province and to be posted in public for all peoples to read. The people were to be ready for this day to do as the order commanded. Driven by the king's order, the runners left Susa just as the law became public in the fortified part of Susa. While the king and Haman sat down to have a drink, the city of Susa was in total shock.

Observation

This chapter quickly picks up speed, revealing our antagonist and his schemes. Mordecai has upset Haman, who plots to destroy not only Mordecai, but every Jewish person. To do so, Haman convinces the King of this plan.

Application

Unfortunately, the intent to cause harm against an entire group of people based only on prejudice against them is something that has continued throughout history. What might the story of Esther teach us about taking a stance against oppressive regimes? Are there places where you feel afraid to stand up for someone else? How might you ask God to give you courage?

Prayer

God, you have created us in community and desire for all humanity to be united. Our world is broken and divisive, often feeling far away from your intended way for our lives. Give me strength and patience to stand against oppression, and for your peace. Amen.

Wednesday, August 16

Scripture: Esther 4:1-17

When Mordecai learned what had been done, he tore his clothes, dressed in mourning clothes, and put ashes on his head. Then he went out into the heart of the city and cried out loudly and bitterly. He went only as far as the King's Gate because it was against the law for anyone to pass through it wearing mourning clothes. At the same time, in every province and place where the king's order and his new law arrived, a very great sadness came over the Jews. They gave up eating and spent whole days weeping and crying out loudly in pain. Many Jews lay on the ground in mourning clothes and ashes. When Esther's female servants and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, the queen's whole body showed how upset she was. She sent everyday clothes for Mordecai to wear instead of mourning clothes, but he rejected them. Esther then sent for Hathach, one of the royal eunuchs whose job it was to wait on her. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was going on and why he was acting this way. Hathach went out to Mordecai, to the city square in front of the King's Gate. Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him. He spelled out the exact amount of silver that Haman promised to pay into the royal treasury. It was in exchange for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave Hathach a copy of the law made public in Susa concerning the Jews' destruction so that Hathach could show it to Esther and report it to her. Through him Mordecai ordered her to go to the king to seek his kindness and his help for her people. Hathach came back and told Esther what Mordecai had said. In reply Esther ordered Hathach to tell Mordecai: "All the king's officials and the people in his provinces know that there's a single law in a case like this. Any man or woman who comes to the king in the inner courtyard without being called is to be put to death. Only the person to whom the king holds out the gold scepter may live. In my case, I haven't been called to come to the king for the past thirty days." When they told Mordecai Esther's words, he had them respond to Esther: "Don't think for one minute that, unlike all the other Jews, you'll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace. In fact, if you don't speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family." Esther sent back this word to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa and tell them to give up eating to help me be brave. They aren't to eat or drink anything for three whole days, and I myself will do the same, along with my female servants. Then, even though it's against the law, I will go to the king; and if I am to die, then die I will." So Mordecai left where he was and did exactly what Esther had ordered him.

Observation

We've now reached the most well-known verse in this book: "Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family" (4:15 CEB) or from the NKJV: "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Application

Frederich Buechner defines calling in this way: "where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." What have you been born for in such a time as this? How is

God creating opportunities for you to use your gifts and skills to meet a great need in the world?

Prayer

Open my senses, O Holy One, to be mindful of your presence in my life today. Help me to notice where my deep gladness is found, and how it intersects with the hunger of the world. Guide me in following you. Amen.

Thursday, August 17

Scripture: Esther 7:1-10

When the king and Haman came in for the banquet with Queen Esther, the king said to her, "This is the second day we've met for wine. What is your wish, Queen Esther? I'll give it to you. And what do you want? I'll do anything—even give you half the kingdom." Queen Esther answered, "If I please the king, and if the king wishes, give me my life—that's my wish—and the lives of my people too. That's my desire. We have been sold—I and my people—to be wiped out, killed, and destroyed. If we simply had been sold as male and female slaves, I would have said nothing. But no enemy can compensate the king for this kind of damage." King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is this person, and where is he? Who would dare do such a thing?"

Esther replied, "A man who hates, an enemy—this wicked Haman!" Haman was overcome with terror in the presence of the king and queen. Furious, the king got up and left the banquet for the palace garden. But Haman stood up to beg Queen Esther for his life. He saw clearly that the king's mood meant a bad end for him. The king returned from the palace garden to the banquet room just as Haman was kneeling on the couch where Esther was reclining. "Will you even molest the queen while I am in the house?" the king said. The words had barely left the king's mouth before covering Haman's face with dread. Harbona, one of the eunuchs serving the king, said, "Sir, look! There's the stake that Haman made for Mordecai, the man who spoke up and did something good for the king. It's standing at Haman's house—seventy-five feet high."

"Impale him on it!" the king ordered. So they impaled Haman on the very pole that he had set up for Mordecai, and the king's anger went away.

Observation

We've skipped from yesterday's reading, and now have gathered with Queen Esther on the second day of her great feast. Here she has embraced the place God has called her, summoned her bravery, and makes her big ask of the King to save her people.

Application

Esther had gained the trust of the King, and while it was a BIG risk to reveal herself as Jewish, and to plea for the safety of her people, she takes the leap and succeeds. I'm always grateful here that Esther took time to build trust in her relationship with the King. And that the King allowed his mind to be open and changed. It is difficult for most of us to change our minds, especially when it relates to our own actions or beliefs! When was the

last time you changed your mind? When was the last time God guided you to a different, or deeper understanding of someone or something?

Prayer

God you are faithful and steadfast, continually pouring into us wisdom, mercy, and grace. Keep me open to learning new things and willing to change my mind. Remind me that this is a sign of strength and wisdom. Amen.

Friday, August 18

Scripture: Esther 8:11-17

The order allowed Jews in each town to join together and defend their lives. The Jews were free to wipe out, kill, and destroy every army of any people and province that attacked them, along with their women and children. They could also take and keep anything their attackers owned. The one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus on which they could do so was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar). A copy of the writing was to become law in each province and be on public display for all its peoples to read. The Jews were to be ready on this day to get back at their enemies. The riders mounted on royal horses left Susa, spurred on by the king's order, and the law also became public in the fortified part of Susa. Mordecai went out from the king's presence in a blue and white royal robe wearing a large gold crown and a white and red-purple coat. The city of Susa greeted him with shouts of joy. For the Jews it was a day of light, happiness, joy, and honor. In every province and in every town—wherever the king's order and his law arrived—for the Jews it was a day of happiness and joy. For them it meant feasts and a holiday. Many people in the land became Jews themselves, out of fear of the Jews.

Observation

"For the Jews it was a day of light, happiness, joy, and honor." (8:16). What a great verse and description! Because of Esther's courage, their lives have been saved. Cities and towns rejoice as their suffering turns to gladness, their despair into joy.

Application

I think it could be easy to overly simplify this story saying, "See? All things turned out for good!" And that is true here, but it is because of the courage, bravery and actions of a few, that the lives of many were saved. We don't end oppression or any problem in our world by waiting passively. Instead, we must ask God for guidance, wisdom, and courage not only to act, but to *follow* the right course. How is God stirring in you this week, directing your thoughts, words, and actions so that all people might experience this light, joy, and honor?

Prayer

God of light, happiness, joy, and honor. I praise you for the ways you have moved in the lives of so many throughout history. Help me to follow in the footsteps of disciples and

prophets who have gone before. May their imprint make an impact on my life today, too. Amen.

Saturday, August 19

Scripture: Esther 9:20-32

Mordecai wrote these things down and sent letters to all the Jews in all the provinces, both near and far, of King Ahasuerus. He made it a rule that Jews keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as special days each and every year. They are the days on which the Jews finally put to rest the troubles with their enemies. The month is the one when everything turned around for them from sadness to joy, and from sad, loud crying to a holiday. They are to make them days of feasts and joyous events, days to send food gifts to each other and money gifts to the poor. The Jews agreed to continue what they had already begun to do—just what Mordecai had written to them. Indeed, Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite's son, the enemy of all the Jews, had planned to destroy the Jews. He had servants throw *pur* (that is, the dice) to find the best month and day to trouble greatly and destroy them. But when Esther came before the king, his written order said: The wicked plan that Haman made against the Jews should turn back on him instead. So they impaled him and his sons on pointed poles. That is why people call these days Purim, by using the ancient word *pur*. It all fit with what this letter said, with what they saw happen, and with what they themselves went through. The Jews agreed that they, their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, as well as all non-Jews who become Jews, should always keep these two days. They agreed to follow the written rules—and at the proper time too—every year. So forever every family, province, and town remembers to keep these days. These days of Purim won't die out among the Jews. They will remember to keep them forever. Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with her full royal power to show that this second letter about Purim was correct. Letters conveying good wishes and words of friendship were sent to all the Jews throughout the one hundred twenty-seven provinces in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. Their aim was to make sure that the Jews kept these days of Purim at the proper time, following the rule that Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had made. The rule fit well with what they themselves had agreed to do forever and with other things they did—like fasting and lamenting. Esther's order made these features of Purim part of the law, so it was written down.

Observation

The story of Esther is celebrated in the Jewish holiday of Purim. While many holidays include fasting, Purim is one of feasting and great celebration! It marks the stories of triumph for a people long and harshly persecuted. It is a holiday noting the strength, perseverance, and faithfulness of God and God's people. (In 2024, Purim will be March 23-24).

Application

When you consider hardships in your life, have you found ways to celebrate and mark their closure? How do you celebrate the strength, perseverance, and faithfulness of God in your life? For Christians, one place we celebrate this is Easter – a reminder that life conquers death, and that the 'worst thing is never the last thing.' How might you celebrate and give thanks for God's faithfulness in your life today?

Prayer

God of life, thank you for the story of Esther and set-aside-time this week to learn more about her courage and faith. May her legacy make an impact on my life, and may your faithful presence throughout time be a source of comfort and joy. Amen.