

"Call"

Esther 4:1-14 and Matthew 5:13-16

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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Ignorance is bliss. Did your mom ever tell you that? Mine did, pretty often. You see I was one of those kids, (and mothers out there this morning, you'll probably recognize the type) ... I was one of those kids who loved to ask questions. And most of the time my mother would try to answer them. But when her patience would finally run out, she'd say to me, "You know Jim, sometimes ignorance is bliss."

When I was growing up, I didn't really understand what she meant. But these days I think I do. And in honor of my mother this morning, and to demonstrate to all of you just how true your mother's words really are, I want to enlighten you about some laws in the state of Texas that you might not know about. And after I do, maybe you'll agree with my mother that ignorance sometimes really is bliss!

Did you know for instance that in the state of Texas it's illegal to carry wire cutters in your pocket? Did you know that? Were you aware that it's against the law in Texas to spit on a public sidewalk? Probably not. Had you heard that you're breaking the law in Texas if you milk a cow that you don't own? Or shoot buffalo from a porch, or fish out of the window of a hotel? I thought you might not have heard about those restrictions and you might like to know.

On the other hand, did you know in Texas it's legal for a blind person to go hunting as long as someone is in their party who's not blind? Kind of a scary law that one, but that's just my opinion. Maybe yours is different. And speaking of my opinion, here's my personal favorite Texas law. Did you know it's illegal for anyone in the state of Texas to appear in a church in disguise? So I never want to see any of you sitting here on Sunday morning wearing dark glasses!

Interesting, isn't it? All these laws are real. You and I just didn't know about them. Thankfully the police in Kingwood probably don't know about them either. So we're probably safe. But Esther wasn't! And as we think about part of her story again this morning on Mother's Day, I wonder if you noticed how our Scripture lesson from the book of Esther began. I wonder if you noticed how blissfully ignorant Esther was about the new law that was established by the decree of her husband the King, the law that gave Haman permission to take the lives and property of a people known as the Jews. I wonder if you noticed that

at the beginning of Esther chapter 4, Esther doesn't seem to know anything about that law?

Because if you do notice, the question you have to ask yourself is why? Why of all people is Esther so out of touch, so unaware of this new law? And the truth is I can't give you a complete answer to that question. But I can offer you a part of what I think the answer is. I think the reason Esther didn't know was because she was shielded from the truth.

You see, the customs of the palace in the Persian empire mandated that all of the women in the palace including the queen be sequestered. They lived in a separate section of the palace reserved exclusively for their use. They ate there. They slept there. And most of their days, they were busy there with activities designed to make them more beautiful; nail treatments, hair treatments, skin treatments.

And some of you mothers are probably sitting there right now thinking to yourselves; a few days in a place like that sounds pretty good to me. But if you are, then let me remind you: a life of luxury always comes with a price tag. And in this case the price tag associated with the life Esther was living was her awareness of what was happening around her.

I suppose we can empathize with her though, at least in one way. Because the truth is, as Presbyterians, many of us are having the feeling our awareness of events happening around us in our denomination hasn't been very good either. Did you know, for instance, much about the General Assembly before the past couple of weeks and the report of the Denominational Relations Study Team? If you're like many folks in our congregation, I doubt you did.

And it's not just our congregation. I heard this week from our Commissioned Lay Pastor, Mark Smith, about a conference he attended recently, a gathering of almost 500 Presbyterian men; pastors, elders and laymen. Mark told me at that gathering, the men enjoyed good food, good fellowship, good conversation. But he also told me, he didn't hear one conversation, not a single one about the votes currently being taken in Presbyteries to change the standards for ordination in our denomination, or adopt a new Form of Government, or add a new Confession to our Book of Confessions. And he said to me, "Honestly Jim, that surprised me."

So after a day or so hearing nobody talking about what's going on in our denomination right now, Mark told me, "I went out of my way to ask the people I met if they had heard anything about these issues. He asked men who were there from congregations all over Texas, and he told me everyone he asked said

they didn't know a thing about it, had no idea that votes were being taken on these issues. And some of the men he asked even asked him where they could find out more about what was happening.

And I suppose that's what Esther was doing too when she sent Hathak to Mordecai. She wanted to find out what was happening, why Mordecai was behaving the way he was, why he was wearing sackcloth and ashes. She had no idea a new law had been made. She'd been too busy with her own life to notice. But the fourth chapter of Esther says Mordecai told Hathak what was going on. He told Hathak "everything that had happened, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews."

And after he told him Mordecai gave Hathak "a copy of the text of the edict which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther." And he sent Hathak back to Esther to explain these things to her and to "instruct her to go into the king's presence and beg for mercy for her people." But when Esther heard Hathak's report, (and I love the honesty of the Bible in this part of the story), even with a copy of the new law sitting right there in front of her, Esther hesitated.

Three years ago, a survey was taken. It was a survey of more than 2000 American drivers. And the survey showed that nearly 10 percent of those drivers were driving a car whose "Check Engine" light was on! Even more amazing though was the fact that half the men and women who were doing this said the light had been illuminated on their dashboard for a month! And they had just ignored it!

When they were asked why, these drivers had a whole range of responses. Some said they ignored it because the car seemed to be "running just fine." Others pointed to a lack of money to make repairs. And some simply noted that they just didn't have time to worry about it.

But worrying about it was exactly what Esther did. Worrying about what Mordecai had told her and asked her to do. And because she worried about what to do, she hesitated. But a few days later, she sent a message back to Mordecai with Hathak. The message said, "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned, the king has but one law; that they be put to death unless he extends the golden scepter to them and spares their lives. And thirty days have now passed since the king has called for me." Can you hear the worry in that message? I think you can. It's not too hard to hear.

But now notice what happens to Mordecai as he listens to the message, especially to those last few words, the ones that tell him in Esther's voice that the king hasn't called for her to come to him for thirty days. Notice where Mordecai's mind goes when he hears those words, will you?

Because if you notice, you'll see it. His mind goes immediately goes back to one place. And that place isn't a political place. He's not thinking about helping Esther politically. He's thinking about something more important than that. He's thinking about helping Esther personally. He's thinking about helping her put God back on the throne of her life.

You see Mordecai's deep desire for his adopted daughter Esther is this. He wants her not to be worried about the call of Xerxes. He wants her to be worried about the call of God. He wants her to be listening for what God calls her to do in this situation not Xerxes. And you see, for Esther, and for you and me right now that's the issue. Whose voice will we listen to? Whose call will we follow? When it gets right down to it, who's really the Lord of our lives? Who do we belong to?

And because that's the real issue, that's what's truly at stake in Esther's life, Mordecai doesn't hesitate, when he hears Esther's worry. He speaks the truth to her. But he does it in love. And he tells her three things. First he tells Esther about reality, the reality of her situation. Because she's a Jew, if nothing changes, he tells her, she will suffer death along with the rest of her Lord's people. Not even her position will protect her. And she shouldn't think so. It's a difficult message for Mordecai to give to Esther. But it's a truthful one, and she needs to hear it. So he sends it to her, but my sense is as he gives her the message his voice isn't harsh. He's simply speaking the truth to her in love.

Second Mordecai tells Esther about her history. And I love these words, the first words of verse 14. "Remember," Mordecai tells Esther, "remember the history I taught you as a girl growing up in my house. Remember the stories I read to you from the scrolls. Remember the Scripture Esther, and realize the truth, 'if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place.'"

Can you hear what Mordecai's saying? You can if you know the Old Testament. Because the story of God's deliverance is told over and over again in the pages of the Old Testament. Did you know that in between the book of Genesis and the book of Malachi, the words "deliver" and "deliverance" are found over 400 times!

Abraham experiences God's deliverance. So does Jacob. Moses does too. Rahab finds deliverance for herself and her family at the fall of Jericho. Gideon finds deliverance for Israel during the days of the Judges. Elijah discovers God's deliverance in his confrontation with Jezebel. And do you remember what David said to Saul just before he walked out to fight Goliath? "God has delivered me from the mouth of lions and bears," David says, "so I know He'll surely deliver me from this Philistine."

Mordecai knew that was the message Esther needed to hear in the midst of her worry. She needed to be reminded that the Lord of her life is a God who specializes in delivering His people out of distress. And I imagine that's a message a lot of us need to hear this morning too. Because I know that many of you are distressed as I am by what is happening and what's going to happen in the PCUSA. I know many of you are wondering what to do about it.

And if you're worrying or wondering, I want you to listen now, once more, to Mordecai. Because he's speaking to all of us this morning. He's reminded Esther of reality. He's reminded her who her Lord is. And he's reminded her of history, the history of God's people, that God can be trusted to deliver His people in times of distress and danger.

And now, with his last words Mordecai calls Esther to listen to one last word. "Who knows," he says, "but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" And whether you know it or not, just like Esther you and I this morning are in a royal position. For just like Esther we need to make a decision.

As you face into an uncertain future as a Presbyterian and a Christian who will be your Lord? Whose word will you listen to? And most important of all, whose call will you follow and who will you trust to deliver you?

Let's pray ...