

Stewardship Sunday – Christ’s Love, Our Calling January 22, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Based on Esther 4:12-17 written by Pastor Paul Horn

For Such a Time as This!

I. A time of vision

II. A time of saving

I know it’s two months away... but it’s always good to plan ahead. You have your calendar marked for March 17th? St. Patrick’s Day! If you’re a true Irish Protestant, you wear orange and not green – look it up sometime. Another festival to mark on your calendar, March Madness – the NCAA basketball tournament. There’s another festival in March not found on your calendar, on the 19th - Purim. Purim is a Jewish festival held in honor of a woman named Hadassah, you know her better as Esther from the Bible. Purim celebrates God’s rescue of the Jews. The Festival of Purim is celebrated by the Jews every year. They exchange gifts of food and drink. They perform acts of charity for the poor among them. While the main focus of the festival is remembering how God used Esther to save his people, it probably should include her cousin, Mordecai for his encouraging words. He was the one who told his cousin Esther to take action. His words still encourage God’s people today to take action – “For such a time as this! A time of vision and a time of saving.”

Esther enjoyed the good life - pampered and privileged, splurged on and made to feel special. She was chosen from hundreds of young girls to be the next queen for King Xerxes. Before that, she had undergone some pampering that most ladies here would truly envy—not just two hours or two days in a spa, but a whole twelve months! There were six months of special oil treatments for her skin, and another six of perfume and cosmetic treatments, all designed to make her look and smell like a Persian beauty.

Before that, though, were the tough times: she had been taken captive by a foreign army, orphaned in the process, and now living with her cousin - a future so uncertain. When she finally had some good things fall her way, it’s possible that she felt a little like any of us would feel: “It’s about time! I’m worth it!” Ladies, if anyone could relate, you could. There are times when you’re taken for granted, overlooked, overworked. Then something special happens—a spa certificate from your husband, a weekend when your kids do the chores, a bonus from the boss. Perhaps at times like that you may think, “It’s about time, because I’m worth it!”

But the ladies aren’t the only ones who have a “I’m worth it” mentality. Husbands and dads think they need special “down time,” teenagers think they should receive more perks than they do, seasoned citizens think they have already paid their dues—there are plenty of times when we all are think we should be pampered and made to feel special. And if someone else won’t do it, we’re more than ready to pamper ourselves, because we deserve it!

Now, I’m not against down time, I’m not against taking a break or vacation. But haven’t there been too many times we have found time to take life way too easy, live life way too self-centered? I’m going to do this because it’s good for me. We so easily fall into the mantra of “the me” society.

Esther fell into that same trap. Here’s what happened: Haman, a royal official, had convinced King Xerxes to allow the total annihilation of the Jewish race. Esther thought she was safe because she was the queen. She wasn’t about to risk her position as queen or her wonderful pampered life in the palace or her very own life to approach the king and plead for his mercy on behalf of her people. Mordecai sent her a message that brought her back to reality: “**Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?**” (Esther 4:13-14)

What Mordecai said was something we all need to hear: “It’s not all about you. There are others out there, too. And who knows? Maybe God has put you at this place at this time for the very purpose of contributing to the needs of others.” This was a time for vision, a time not to look in the mirror and ask, “What about me?” but instead to look at the rest of humanity and ask, “What about them?”

Didn’t Jesus ask that question, when crowds of thousands came to listen to him preach, even though

he was exhausted and hungry, he didn't say, "Go home. I need a break. I'm worn out." He saw that they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd and he asked, "What about them?" He sat down and taught them about salvation. He saw that the bigger picture in life was not about him but about what he could do for the world. He even said once, "**The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**" That was Jesus' vision – he had you in mind and how he could accomplish what you and I could not do to get right with God – a perfect life of selfless service.

Isn't that what Mordecai said to his cousin Esther, that just maybe you are here, in this place, at this time, for such a time as this, a time of vision, a time to look at things differently. It's not about you; it's about others and their needs, too. The apostle in Romans 12 said, "**Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you**" (Romans 12:3). When you look at your entire New Testament — over 150 times the phrases "Do unto others" or "Do each other" or "Do to others" are used to move you towards less navel gazing and a more "faithful" vision of thinking about the needs of others, much like Mordecai urged Esther to think of the bigger picture.

So, with this new vision of others, the question now was, "What would it cost?" A throne, a crown, a claim to the kingdom, a royal name, royal position, royal perks—it was all on the line, all for the sake of others. We're not talking about Esther. We're talking about our Savior. Thankfully for Jesus, it was not all about himself. When Jesus faced the dilemma of people heading to extermination, to extinction, to an eternity of hell, he didn't think of himself. He couldn't think of himself. All he could do was think of you and your need to be saved.

Here's how the Apostle Paul put it: "**(Jesus) being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!**" (Philippians 2:5-8) Just like Esther, Jesus had his "for such a time like this" moment, only his was far greater, because it meant the saving of all people of all time. And it's that great grace of Jesus that we celebrate every day of our lives—his willingness to put his life on the line, even more so than Esther did, because his life was taken so that ours would not be; his righteousness that makes us acceptable in the sight of the King of heaven instead of appearing like conniving and selfish people; his compassionate plea so that the King of heaven would change the edict of extermination to a proclamation of eternal life.

And now, as we celebrate that love every day, Christ's love becomes our calling in life. As we have been saved, we now have the opportunity to save others, in a sense. Our lifetime is a "for such a time as this" moment. Think about it... Is there someone you know who needs to be saved from a few tears or maybe even a lifetime of unnecessary sadness? Then look for a time and a way that you can "**comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God**" (2 Cor. 1:4). Is there someone who would come to church, if only they had someone to sit with? Then maybe this is your "**how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news**" (Romans 10:15) moment. If you are the kind of person who doesn't need any recognition at all, then maybe becoming a private prayer warrior to pray for others is just the thing for you for such a time as this.

I think that there is no other time in the history of our congregation than right now, for us to expand our vision so the saving might be even greater. Is there a ministry in your church you could take over for your pastor so that he could focus more on preaching, teaching and being with his people? Is there a need in the community or church that we've identified, a ministry that hasn't been started, but something that you and other members could begin? Is there a congregation in our synod or a mission overseas that could use our offerings, our letters of encouragement, our care packages, so that more saving might go on?

There are so many ways to "save" others, but those ways need to be "seen" first. Maybe this is your "for such a time as this" time—a time for greater vision, a time for saving others, or maybe just a time for encouraging others to have greater vision or be more involved in saving others. We don't do it to be recognized, just like Esther never envisioned the festival of Purim to be held in her honor. But we do contribute to the needs of others. We do have greater vision. We do what we can to

save others—all in honor of Christ who loved us and gave himself for us. That's because Christ's love is our calling, and our calling is for such a time as this. Amen.