

Opening

Esther Saved

Check-in & Introductions

The Bible Story

Please watch the story, following the link provided. If you would like to read the story as well, the text has been provided below.

Watch the Story *(Biblical adaptations written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

Together, watch the children's story time found on Manchester Children & Families Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/178276089786532/>

Old Testament Lesson

Esther 4:10-17 (NRSV)

¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, ¹¹“All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces 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 scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days.” ¹²When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, ¹³Mordecai 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. ¹⁴For 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.” ¹⁵Then 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.” ¹⁷Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Wondering Questions (Part I)

“Wondering Questions” are open ended discussion questions. These are the same questions that our children are working through!

Wondering Questions for Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

1. I wonder how Queen Vashti felt when she said "no" to King Xerxes?
2. I wonder how it felt to Esther when she couldn't tell anyone she was Jewish?
3. I wonder how God felt when the people killed each other?

Wondering Questions for Older Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

4. When Mordecai told Esther not to tell anyone she was Jewish, he was asking her to lie. Why did he ask her to do that? Was it right or wrong? Why?
5. Have you ever had to pretend when you were with a group of people? How did you feel?
6. In the whole book of Esther, God's name is not mentioned once. Why do you think that might be?
7. How do you feel about the women in this story; Vashti and Esther? Do you think they knew each other? If so, do you think they would have liked each other?

What's Going On

In the Good Shepherd children's curriculum, a section called "Teacher Helps" is provided. This section gives a deeper background to us adults Please take turns reading through this section.

Teacher Helps (written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)

Many who read this story think that if we are celebrating women in the Bible we need to pay as much attention to Vashti as we do to Esther. Perhaps she is the better model for young women today. She refused to be paraded around by a husband who had too much to drink and was trying to prove his manhood to all who were in attendance. She refused to be put on display at his whim. And then Xerxes divorced her. He did so because the advisors told him that if he didn't act quickly all the women of the kingdom would think it was ok to disobey their husbands. Think of the power these men put in the hands of Vashti.

The setting of our story is in Persia, during the time of the Exile. Esther is the daughter of a family taken by Nebuchadnezzar when the city of Jerusalem and the temple were burned to the ground and the people deported to Babylon. At the beginning of the story she is an orphan, cared for by an uncle. Soon she becomes the new Queen, although she is instructed by Mordecai not to tell Xerxes that she's Jewish. Esther kept that secret for years, divulging it only when it became necessary for her to negotiate for the lives of those she loved.

This story is one that seems to have come right out of "Aladdin". Although it is not an historical novel, it does move within the structures of the courts in Persia very well. Its purpose may have simply been to keep in the minds of Jewish people why they celebrate the festival of Purim each March. Only this book and the book of Ruth carry the names of women. The book of Esther has been somewhat controversial because it never mentions the name of God.

I have left out the details of death in a couple of cases. Hanging seems to have been the preferred form of execution in Persia at this time. Both the men who plotted to kill Xerxes and Haman are hanged. This is a detail I did not feel was necessary to share with the children. As always with Good Shepherd, when we talk about death we talk about it sadly and with pain. Even the death of our enemies takes the lives of some of God's children.

I have also left out the ending of the story where the Jewish people turn and basically slaughter thousands of people. This may be good discussion for older children or adults, as we consider why people who are given their freedom turn and do to others what they had feared themselves.

The other point I didn't emphasize much is the beauty pageant aspect of the search for a queen. Notice that not only were all the young women prepared for a year, but Xerxes slept with each of them. They all became his "wives". But they didn't all have the full privilege of wives. In other words, he tried them to see if he liked them. He slept with all of them, and then chose his queen from the one he liked the best.

As you can tell, this story speaks on many different levels. It is a powerful story for those who are ever afraid that they can't complete a task because of what might happen to them. Mordecai's words to Esther, "Maybe you were made queen for a time like this", are a call to each of us today. We can all use whatever resources we have to stand up for those who need us and to tell the great story of God's love.

In the first wondering question we ask how the children think Queen Vashti felt when she said "no" to the king. These questions are always fun as you see girls and boys alike struggle with

the roles of male and female. We don't know her feelings, but the children will probably lead us in a great direction.

Next, we wonder how Esther felt when she couldn't tell anyone she was Jewish. Most of the children will believe she was sad, or maybe angry. Some will even connect that she was lying and may wonder how God felt about that. Most children remember a time when they have "not told" something that might have been important. Their responses to this question will probably reflect their own feelings about that time.

The final wondering question asks how God felt when so many people were killed. This is put in to help the children to continue to articulate God's choice of life for us and the sadness of death. If you have told the story with sadness in your voice as you speak of death, the children will probably say that God was sad. Some of the younger children may say that God was glad because they were going to hurt Esther and her family and friends. As hard as that is, let it stand. Often an older child will make a different statement about God's feelings in response to such an offering.

Wondering Questions (Part II)

Wondering Questions for Adults

1. How might a child hear this story? What might this story mean to a child?
2. Is there a cause you honestly believe you would die for? Is there a "hill you would die on?"
3. Why do you think that the Book of Ester does not contain any of the names of God?
4. In this week's sermon we were given an image of Esther as a trickster. She breaks rules to cooperate with God's desire to save the people. She married a gentile (king of Persia). She eats food that is impure (banquet feasts). She lies/deceives the king, hides her Jewish identity, and hosts a fake banquet. She learned from Vashti that direct defiance didn't work unless she was seeking to be deposed. She uses deception and tricks to get her way. Reflect on the statement: "God's faithfulness is not tied to "correct" behavior."
5. How do we limit God with our expectations of where, when, and how God ought to work?

Closing

Prayer

Holy God, you are not limited by our narrow scope, and we praise you. Thank you for being with us no matter where we are, no matter when it is, and no matter what we do. Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on people from the first Testament who used their voice for your will and your kingdom. Thank you for this gathered community. In the name of your son, Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, **Amen**.

Study Link

<https://manchestrumc.org/all-church-study/>

"God's faithfulness is not tied to a specific place or a specific time."