



2 ADVENT

DECEMBER 6/7, 2014

PASTOR SCOTT FULLER
ESTHER 4:1-17; MATTHEW 5:13-16
Your Time, Your Place

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Our two-year old granddaughter is named Sophia, or Sophie. Our daughter, Rachel, picked Sophie's name after delivering her, even though it was **not** one that she and her husband, Tim, had been *trying on for size*, if their newborn turned out to be a girl. Rachel explained her spur-of-the moment decision by saying something like, "When I saw her, she just looked like a Sophie." And that, as they say, was that!

Now, **Sophia** is *also* the Greek word for **wisdom** – a gift which **only** comes to most of us:

-a) by the grace of God,

-b) by questioning everything *or*

-c) by experiencing life's wide array of *ups-and-downs*. I want to focus for a moment on that **second** one, *questioning everything*.

Those of you who've ever spent more than 5 minutes in the presence of a two-year-old: What's their *most favorite question*...to ask? Exactly!!!

Our Sophie, and **every other two-year-old**, asks: **Why???** So, I apologize in advance for asking **you** this question, but our Bible story about Esther **requires** that I do. So here goes:

-Why...?

-Why are you *who-and-where* you are?

-Why has your life turned out as it has? In short,

-why has God put you here – in this place and at this time?

And the question **behind** that question is this:

-why might God be calling you, calling YOU...to take a stand, to make a difference, to act on behalf of someone in need?

The short, but far-from-easy-answer to my question is this:

-because that's what God is calling each and every one of us to do – use our talents, our time, our treasures, our tenacity – to bless the people God puts in our lives...

A **precious** few are asked to be willing to make the **ultimate** sacrifice – give their **lives**, if need be, to save or help others...and we are **all humbled** by such stories of self-less love. We know some of the accounts of people in uniform who show unbelievable courage in the face of danger to protect their friends or innocent civilians.

We also marvel at people like young *Malala* (Mah-**lah**-lah) *Yousafzai* (**You**-chef-zai) the young Pakistani girl who just received the Nobel Peace prize.

She's the one whom the Taliban tried to kill for promoting the education of girls in her country. Her would-be assassins actually **stormed** her school bus, **shot** her in the head and **left** her for dead. But **miraculously** she has recovered, and not only that, but continues to study and advocate for the education of girls throughout the world.

That kind of determination to do the **right thing** in spite of **personal danger** lies at the very heart of our bible story about **Esther**.

[Re-tell the story in chapters 2-7 of Esther]

Jews are living in Persia.

Mordecai adopts Esther.

King looks for a new queen.

Esther enters contest, is quiet about her Jewishness, is crowned queen.

Mordecai foils a plot to kill the king.

Haman hates Mordecai and all the Jews.

Haman convinces the king to sign an edict sentencing all Jews to die.

Mordecai pushes Esther to intervene with the King but she is afraid.

As you heard in our lesson, there was a law that anyone who approached the king without being invited would be put to death. Nevertheless, says Mordecai to Esther:

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 (Esther 4:14).

So Esther decides to go the king, stare death in the face, and use her God-given gifts of **status**, **access** and **favor** to do what she alone among her people could do, knowing full well that she might die...

This *reluctant hero* theme is popular in **many** modern adventure stories. Listen to the following quote and tell me if you know the character who's being written about.

"emotionally, *she* is betrayed. She's a foreigner in a strange land. She knows that people are looking to her to make a change, and this is the time where she realizes she can't stand by and do nothing. (Her enemy) has done too much. There has been too much deception, and the people *she* loves are in danger. She will do whatever it takes to keep them safe." Berwah, Tanvi (May 15, 2014). "[Filmmaker Roundtable: Katniss, the two-movies split, Effie and more](#)". *hunger-games.net*. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

[Substitute the name *Katniss Everdeen* for the word *she*]

That sounds like Queen Esther, doesn't it? Does anyone recognize the actual hero? It's a quote from a movie person – about *Katniss Everdeen*, the reluctant hero of the famous series: The Hunger Games.

But unlike Katniss, before Queen Esther puts her life on the line, she asks Mordecai to gather all the Jews in the city to fast and pray for her, even as she and her maids do the same in the palace.

Only then, on the third day, filled with fear – but also, I'm convinced, filled with a deep sense of God's peace that passes all understanding – only then does she dare approach the king.

Well, not only does the king **welcome** Esther, he says to her, *What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom!*

And so she launches her plan both to save her people – and remove the evil Haman and his plan to kill all the Jews in the city.

So there it is – that's the story of Esther and her willingness to use her gifts to help people in need – even if it meant that she might die in the process. She came to realize that Mordecai was right: perhaps she had been chosen queen for this very

reason – so that she might act as God’s special servant and save the lives of so many of her people.

So once again, I’ll ask of **you** that two-year-old’s question: Why...?

-Why are you *who-and-where* you are?

-Why has your life turned out as it has? In short,

-*why has God put you here – in this place and at this time?* And

-*why might God be calling you, calling YOU...to take a stand, to make a difference, to act on behalf of someone in need?*

And if it’s true that the answer is because *God is calling each and every one of us to use our talents, our time, our treasures, our tenacity – to bless the people God puts in our lives*...then what will that look like for me, for you?

-Perhaps you have the gift of prayer.

-Or you’re blessed with money to share.

-Maybe you have the time to visit people who are sick or lonely.

-Many here embrace God’s call to teach children, lead Bible studies, sing solos or in groups, play an instrument, serve coffee and goodies, or work on the Council or committees. Whatever your gifts, whatever your treasures, know that God is calling you – has maybe even placed you here at this time for a very special reason.

I hope and pray that you have the **wisdom** to take time, like Esther, to pray and discern God’s will for you. Then I also pray that you act on that calling with **courage** to do what is right; with **compassion** for those you’re able to help; and with a sense of God’s **peace** that passes all understanding as you seek to serve our new-born king. Amen.