

“Together, the Courage to Do Justice”
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Summer Sermon Series on Fearless Faith
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22 (NRSV)

Esther 7:1-6

¹So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ²On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” ³Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. ⁴For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.” ⁵Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?” ⁶Esther said, “A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

Esther 7:9-10

⁹Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Esther 9:20-22

²⁰Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far,²¹enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, ²²as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

Sermon

Together, the Courage to Do Justice

Queen Esther could have looked the other way.

She could have looked out for number one, for me, myself, and I.

She could have looked for someone else to take care of the mess.

Esther became Queen Esther because of her beauty.
Queen Esther is Esther because she was born into the Hebrew faith.

Esther's story became a book in the Bible – even though God is never mentioned –

because hers is a tale of justice,
of acting justly,
even against all odds
and at tremendous personal risk
for the sake of others.

When Esther is introduced to the king,
he is taken by her physical appearance,
and soon he grows to appreciate her
intelligence and wisdom,
her cleverness and goodness.

She is quickly catapulted into a position of power, yet she keeps herself grounded.

She stays in touch with her Jewish cohorts, her servants and friends

and her close advisor named Mordecai.

While she never tells her husband the king that she is a Jew, she never forgets.

Even though the name of God does not appear in the story,
we sense that God is nigh, that the Lord of Love is at work and play in their lives.

Of course, sadly, not all lives are in tune with the Lord of Love.

Some follow another force.

An advisor named Haman persuades the king
that he can grow richer and more powerful
by obliterating the Jews in their midst
and plundering their goods and
resources.

Mordecai goes into mourning.

Esther is concerned for his personal welfare; why is he so
sad?

He informs his Queen of the impending doom of her people.
Queen Esther is visibly upset yet hesitant to go into action.

Mordecai lays down his cards and says 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)

Together, the Courage to Do Justice

...in such a time as this.

Queen Esther takes a risk.

There is no justice without risk.

Whenever and wherever and however power is abused and
misused,

people suffer, wrongs are done for the wrong reasons
and rights are denied.

Power such as this rarely, if ever, gives up or gives in without
a fight

or first being shown the light,

finally seeing the morality of doing right

and being wholesome and seeking
wholeness.

Social justice has its genesis in a moral understanding and
following

of what is right for the weakest and the smallest,
the lost and the last and the least in our midst.

Every movement for wholeness and communal salvation
begins with someone acting justly.

It takes courage to act justly.

It takes courage to do so together,

courage to care for the sake of someone else in need,
even against all odds

and at tremendous personal risk
for the sake of others.

Consider well Queen Esther's plan of action.

She tells Mordecai to spread the word among their faith
community,

and she calls for three days of fasting by all Jews,
including herself.

Imagine that:

Her first act toward social justice, toward resolving hatred
and oppression,

was to pray, to fast, to seek divine guidance.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a social gospel;

God's love is inextricably linked with the liberation
and freedom

and social needs of the whole people of God.

To tap into the power of love

in order to conquer the powers and principalities that
hate,

one begins with prayer, with fasting,
with practicing the spiritual disciplines of Christian love and
mercy.

As Esther's plan unfolds
the king realizes that his love for Esther
and even for Mordecai
is greater than his love for material
things.
Esther reveals to the king that it is her people, the Hebrew
people,
whom Haman seeks to destroy through the king's
power.
The king sees that Esther and Mordecai were acting justly,
without regard to their own personal danger,
without compromise, without fear,
with faith,
with a sacrificial love,
with a commitment to the greater good,
the common good, the collective
good.

Together, the Courage to Do Justice

This past week Katie Brewer-Calvert, 21, and I represented
this congregation
when we joined the counselor staff
led by Jackie Byrd and Stephen Westbrook at Camp
Christian in Gordon.

If you don't know where Gordon, Georgia is,
just drive south toward Macon, turn left off I-75,
and when you meet Jesus you will know you
are there.

We were a part of the leadership team that made up Junior
Camp 2,
a sleep-away camp for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders.

We sang morning, noon and night;

we worshiped by the lake;
and we explored the wonders of nature
and the nurture of Jesus Christ and his
Church.

We played lots of fun games, like Poison Dart Frog, Statues
in the Garden,

four square and ping pong, slip and slide kickball,
and a rousing all-camp game of volleyball.

Both volleyball teams had 15 or 20 players on their side of
the sand court.

My team was winning handily, 17-9, mostly because we had
more 6th grade boys,

when our opponent sent up a wisp of a girl named Lily
to serve the volleyball.

Lily stroked ace after ace after ace after ace.

As a matter of fact she nailed twelve aces in a row to seal the
win.

Final score: 17-21.

Our curriculum was the same biblical material
we have been drawing upon for this summer sermon
series.[\[1\]](#)

When we gathered in that sacred space on the first day,
we contemplated together the courage to show up,
to be totally present in God's creation with one
another.

On day two we explored together the courage to forgive,
to love ourselves and forgive ourselves
so that we would be able to extend to each
other
the same courtesy, to forgive and love
one another.

In my small group when we told the children that

Jesus taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer
so that by first learning to be forgiven
we could then forgive others,
the children burst into a spontaneous and joyous
recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

On day three we examined together the courage to stand up,
to stand up for one another and for what we firmly
believed to be true.

And on the last full day of camp we studied together the
courage to do justice.

I was blessed to offer the morning keynote talk,
so I shared with them what we have shared here.
By the way, don't tell me that children cannot think
theologically
or grasp real biblical concepts.
When I finished with the following
they went off to their small groups and discussed this
in depth, together.

They learned that the prophets spoke of God's will for
sedequah and *mishpat*,
which are Hebrew words for righteousness and
justice.

At the core of justice is mercy,
and the carrying out of mercy, the embracing of
mercy,

is the embodiment of righteousness.

The Prophets grasped that without one there could not be
the other.

They were mindful of the unity and justice that God desires
for all of creation.

Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Micah spoke up and out
for *sedequah* and *mishpat*,
for righteousness and justice.

A common refrain was that the Lord said,

*“Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you,
just as you have said.
Hate evil and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.” --Amos 5: 14-
15*

*“But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.” --
Amos 5:24*

I unpacked for the children who was at the gates of the city,
and they understood.

One child shared that until recently he had been living in
hotels,

constantly on the move.

He and his church camp friends made the connection about
who was at the city gate,

and who it was that needed to act justly, to make a
difference.

They also learned two new words in Greek.

Two relevant Greek words that apply here are orthodoxy and
orthopraxis.

Orthodoxy means right belief, right worship.

Orthopraxis means to do the right thing.

Our orthopraxis precedes our orthodoxy.
What good is it to believe rightly if we don't practice rightly?

Then we heard a reading of the story called ***Four Feet, Two Sandals***

By: Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed
Illustrated by: Doug Chayka

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGwRkPX8ETY>

(Betty Brewer-Calvert will now read to us this story “*in such a time as this.*”)

Together, the Courage to Do Justice

After hearing this story our church children could have looked the other way.
They could have looked out for number one, for me, myself, and I.
They could have looked for someone else to take care of the mess we are in today.

One small group of 4th, 5th, and 6th grade campers contemplated this story
and discussed in depth what it must be like to be homeless,
to be far from home, to be Muslim,
to be a spiritual descendent of Abraham and Sarah,
just like Christians and Jews,
only to be labeled a Muslim terrorist,
to be harassed and left out
and to have so many
judged by the actions of a few.

Another small group of campers contemplated justice and mercy,
and in an effort to communicate the gist of what they grasped
they created a short skit
that began with a church's food and clothing drive.

The children with the collection of food and goods quickly found a group of people who were hungry while they survived doing odd jobs and fixing things.

The food was shared in community; both the mood and munchies were good.

One of the children who had been fed asked about the church.

One soul from the church said it was fine but the roof was leaking.

We can fix that was the reply.

Let's go fix the roof together, they said, so they did.

Let's fix the church, together.

Let's fix the community, the city, the world, together.

What good is it to believe rightly if we don't practice rightly?

Together we can find the courage to act justly "in such a time as this",

to do justice and mercy one act at a time.

Let's change the tone and tenor "in such a time as this"
so that hate loses its way and love makes the day.

Let's heed the call for prayer and fasting and deepening spirituality

to tap into God's word for today "in such a time as this"

so that together we may have the courage
to bring to light

"what...the Lord requires of you

...to do justice, and to love

kindness,

and to walk humbly with

your God..." (Micah 6: 8)

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[\[1\]](#) Fearless Faith: Courage in Community By: Erin Reed Cooper, Editor. InsideOut: Christian Resources for Outdoor Ministries; Copyright © 2015 by Chalice Press. Produced for and outlines developed by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) Committee on Outdoor Ministries (COM).