

Saturday: Read Esther 4:1-17

Esther, without letting anyone know she was a Jew, became part of King Xerxes' harem, and Xerxes liked her so much that he made her queen. In reality, this didn't give her much power, but it did mean she was able to get closer to the king than others could. This would turn out to be important, because the king had issued a decree that would wipe out all the Jews in the empire...and all the Jews in the empire meant all the Jews in the world. In response, Mordecai, Esther's cousin and a father-figure to her, pulls her aside and says, "You have to do something about this. You're the only one who has a chance." Esther was understandably reluctant, for she knew any action she might take would most likely have dire consequences. Mordecai wouldn't lie to her; he didn't pretend as if there wasn't any danger, as if there wasn't any risk. Instead he said, "Maybe this is why you became queen in the first place. Maybe you were put here for just such a time as this." Why has God put US here at such a time as this? As Christians, we have a gospel of grace that celebrates each and every one of us as a beloved child of God. As Disciples of Christ, we have a unique witness to the gospel that welcomes all people to the Lord's Table — and you don't have to check your brain at the door. As a church, we have the resources, the staff, the facility, and, most importantly, the *people* to do amazing things for the kingdom of God in our community. And right outside our doors there are children, families, neighbors, strangers...all kinds of people who have been waiting *all their lives* for that kind of gospel, and that kind of welcome, *from this kind of church*. **Maybe God put us here for just such a time as this.**

Prayer: Eternal God, strengthen and equip us for the work of your kingdom in this place.



Series: B-sides

**Sermon: The Long and Winding Road
Jeremiah 36 (selections)**

In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations...Then Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at Jeremiah's dictation... And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, 'I am prevented from entering the house of the Lord; so you go yourself, and on a fast day in the hearing of the people in the Lord's house you shall read the words of the Lord from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the people of Judah who come up from their towns. It may be that their plea will come before the Lord, and that all of them will turn from their evil ways, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people.' And Baruch son of Neriah did all that the prophet Jeremiah ordered him...

Then, in the hearing of all the people, Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll, in the house of the Lord... When Micaiah...heard [it], he went down to the king's house, into the secretary's chamber; and all the officials were sitting there... And [when] Micaiah told them all the words that he had heard...the officials sent Jehudi...to say to Baruch, 'Bring the scroll that you read...and come.' So Baruch...took the scroll in his hand and came to them. And they said to him, 'Sit down and read it to us...' When they heard all the words, they turned to one another in alarm, and said to Baruch, 'We certainly must report all these words to the king.' Then they questioned Baruch, 'Tell us now, how did you write all these words? Was it at his dictation?' Baruch answered them, 'He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink on the scroll.' Then the officials said to Baruch, 'Go and hide, you and Jeremiah, and let no one know where you are.'

Leaving the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the secretary, they went to the court of the king; and they reported all the words to the king. Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber...and read it to the king and all the officials... Now...there was a fire burning in the brazier before [the king]. As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a penknife and throw them into the fire...until the entire scroll was consumed... Yet neither the king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words, was alarmed, nor did they tear their garments. Even when [the officials] urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them.

And the king commanded [that they] arrest the secretary Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah. But the Lord hid them.

Now, after the king had burned the scroll... the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim... has burned. And concerning King Jehoiakim... you shall say: Thus says the Lord, You have dared to burn this scroll, saying, Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it human beings and animals? Therefore thus says the Lord concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: He shall have no one to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night. And I will punish him and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity; I will bring on them, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the people of Judah, all the disasters with which I have threatened them—but they would not listen.

Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the secretary Baruch son of Neriah, who wrote on it at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them.

Monday: Read Romans 10:13-17

It is interesting, isn't it, that Paul does *not* say, "beautiful are the words of those who bring good news," or "beautiful are the faces," or "beautiful are the sanctuaries." No, quoting Isaiah 52, Paul says "beautiful are the *feet* of those who bring good news." It's a reminder that, for the gospel to have any power, it has to be heard. And for the gospel to be heard, it has to be spoken to those who need to hear it. Most of us are here because someone, somewhere along the way, took the time, effort, and energy to tell us the story of God's love for us, to tell us the truth about who and whose we are, to tell us the good news. Today we have the great gift and wonderful opportunity to return the favor. Where does the gospel need to be heard? Where is God calling you to carry the gospel today? What will it take for you to move your feet and take it there?

Prayer: Loving God, help me to carry your welcome and grace to the world.

Tuesday: Read Acts 9:1-19

Our faith begins with the good news of an empty tomb, the grave that cannot hold Jesus. And if Jesus is no longer in the tomb, that must mean that he is on the loose. Jesus has a way of showing up in the most unexpected of places. Sometimes the comforting presence of the risen Christ is the only thing that keeps us going. But we would be wise to remember that the risen Christ doesn't *just* bring comfort; sometimes he knocks us sideways...blinds us...calls us. Yes, Jesus comforts...but he also confronts, converts, demands, and intervenes in our lives. The risen Christ has the power to stop us in our tracks, to turn our lives around. If Christ can make an apostle out of Saul, then what can Jesus do with you? In what ways have you met the risen Christ in your life? How has he surprised you? Challenged you? Called you? How will you respond?

Prayer: Risen Christ, open my heart to your call and claim upon my life.

Wednesday: Read Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah is the only book of the bible to end with a question. Jonah has continually run away from God's call to proclaim good news to the people of Nineveh — people Jonah doesn't think are worthy to hear God's good news. Following an object lesson at Jonah's expense, God asks him: shouldn't I be concerned with my people? Like Jonah, and like so many who have already received God's grace, sometimes we have a hard time extending that same grace to one another. We draw lines that God doesn't draw. We see distinctions that God doesn't see. The question mark at the end of the Book of Jonah is actually pointed right at you and me. God is searching our souls to discover what we really believe: Who is worthy of the gospel? Where are we willing to carry the word of the Lord? Can we be happy, as God is happy, when people are forgiven — accepted — even when they might be our least favorite people on earth?

Prayer: Loving God, help me to respond to your grace by extending it to others.

Thursday: Read John 20:24-31

"Doubting" Thomas missed Jesus' first resurrection appearance to the rest of the group. When he finally does see Jesus, he wants to touch, to see, to feel. Jesus lets him, inviting Thomas to touch the wounds on his hands and side. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe," Jesus says. We usually read this as a subtle rebuke of Thomas, but I don't think it really is. I think Jesus just recognizes that it will be harder for the rest of us, for those of us who will come later. Because all that we are left with — all anybody has ever been left with — is the story, the testimony handed down from generation to generation. The story is all we have, and so it has to be enough. All we have is the story. So we tell it any way we can. We tell it with songs and prayers and offerings. We tell it by filling backpacks full of food and visiting shut-ins and providing scholarships for kids to go to camp and spending countless hours in hospital waiting rooms. We tell it by giving our time to God. We tell it by giving our resources to God. Because the best way to tell the story of Jesus is with your life. How will your life tell Jesus' story this week? What will the world know about Jesus because of you?

Prayer: Gracious God, help my life to shine like a light, pointing others to your amazing grace.

Friday: Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

It is clear as we read Paul's words to the church in Corinth that it is a troubled congregation, torn apart by arguments about authority, sexual morality, marriage, lawsuits, riotous behavior at the Lord's supper...just to mention a few! So Paul reminds the members of this fractured community: you are working on a building — building a life — and the foundation for this building has already been laid in Christ Jesus. Your job is to build your life upon that foundation, for you are God's temple. The Spirit of God lives in you, so build a life worthy of that. Build a life on Christ's firm foundation. Paul's words ask of us perhaps the most important and most difficult question of our faith: Is Christ the center of my life? Is Christ the foundation? Is Christ what I've been building upon?

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for the sure foundation of your son, Jesus.