

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 "Esther"

Scripture: Esther 4:1-17, Matthew 25:34-36

Opening Hymn: Christ is coming 795 (1,3,4)

Closing Hymn: Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel 122

Children's Hymn: Hope is a star 119

Choruses: Whom shall I fear (God of Angel Armies), Above all, The Lord thy God is in thy midst

Choir: His name shall be called Peace" John Purifoy

Rev. Steve Filyk

December 9, 2018

Second Sunday of Advent

Do you consider yourself privileged or disadvantaged?

Capable or incapable?

Powerful or vulnerable?

This is something worth thinking about this season.

It informs how we respond to the numerous appeals

That will be coming our way:

Requests for our time, our treasure, and our talents.

Of course, our own self-analysis isn't always accurate.

The mother with three children under five

Smiles when her younger sister complains about being SO busy.

The deficit-financed college student smirks

When his grandpa pleads poverty

After returning from a vacation down south.

The wheelchair-bound grandma,

who is constantly knitting up a storm,

laughs when her granddaughter

lament a lack of skills and talents.

Do you consider yourself privileged or disadvantaged?

Capable or incapable?

Powerful or vulnerable?

If you are unsure whether you can trust your own judgement,

Just consider some of these self-assessment questions

posed by *Globe & Mail* columnist Margaret Wendt:

Every item you can affirm gives you one point.

Count them on your fingers.

If you need to, you can take off your shoes.

I'll be giving bonus points too!

Ready?

- Your family income is \$120,000 or your wealth is over \$1 million.
 - Two points if you can agree with both
- Your mother graduated from university
- You know how to paddle a canoe
- You've been outside of North America, at least twice
 - An extra point if you've visited New Zealand or Australia
- Your family helped you with a down-payment on a house, or you did so for your kids.
 - Extra points for each kid you helped
- When you see two forks in a place setting, you know which one to use first.ⁱ

Let me add a couple of my own:

- You own the home you are living in, or someone else shovels the driveway
- You came to church in an automobile

- You own a set of golf clubs, or downhill skis, or an easel
 - Count three points if you them all
- At dinner there is often a choice of more than one dessert.

So how did you do?

How many of you said yes to more at least five of these questions?

Personal disclosure: I scored 8.

I know it is not fair survey.

There were no questions about clipping coupons,
Or turning down the temperature,
Or refusing to buy a new vehicle...

Some of the ways we hide our power from ourselves and others...

But what does this test say about our privilege?

Do you think that privilege demands responsibility?

PAUSE

Today our Bible lesson brings us out of the land of Judah
into the city of Susa, in what is modern-day Iran.

Last week the prophet Habakkuk

Was warned about the arrival of the Babylonians.

As God promised Babylon conquered Judah.

As God promised Babylon itself was conquered,
Defeated by the Persians.

Now when Babylon defeated Judah,

Many of the people were deported.

But during the Persian Empire
The deported Jews had been allowed
To return to their homeland.

Many returned but some remained.

Some of this diaspora even made their homes in Susa,
the very heart of the foreign empire.

Things seem to be on the upswing for God's people.
Especially when a Jewish girl
became the leading lady in the Empire.

But "Not long after Esther's coronation,
Haman, one of the king's chief officials,
became enraged at [a Jewish man named] Mordecai
for a perceived slight...

[Haman] convinced [king] Xerxes to allow a decree to be issued
that all the Jews be exterminated..."ⁱⁱ

Which brings us into today's story.
Mordecai is Queen Esther's cousin.
More than that, he helped raise her.
He brought her up as his own daughter.

When Mordecai hears about this planned genocide
He pleads with Esther to intercede with the King.

Esther, however, is not convinced
she's the right person for this plan.

Rather than being a person of power and influence,
She's sees herself as vulnerable.

And so, she replies to Mordecai:

“Everyone who works for the king here,
and even the people out in the provinces,
knows that there is a single fate for every man or woman
who approaches the king without being invited:
death.

The one exception is if the king extends his gold scepter;
then he or she may live.
And it's been thirty days now
since I've been invited to come to the king.”ⁱⁱⁱ

PAUSE

Esther knows the law.
She knows she can't just barge in on her husband.

After a month apart, she's not even sure
That the king is still interested in her.
She wasn't his first wife,
And she might not be his last.

Esther is afraid to help Mordecai.
She's convinced she's incapable and vulnerable.

But Mordecai won't let up.
He asks her to reconsider:

“Who knows? Maybe you were made queen for just such a time as this.”
 ‘Maybe you we made queen for a time like this!’ SLOWLY

Esther is in a tough spot.

You can imagine Esther thinking:

“Who? Me? I don’t have any power or authority.
 I’m just an orphan Jew who doesn’t even belong at court,
 faking my way through each day.

[How about sending someone else to talk to the king?]”^{iv}

Despite these worries Esther does the right thing.

She sends a message back to Mordecai asking him
 To gather the Jews in the capital
 and have them fast for her.

Afterwards she will go to the king.

I encourage you to read the rest of the story.

You’ll see that there is quite a reversal.
 Instead of being exterminated
 The Jewish people have an amazing victory
 over their enemies.

We can infer from our story that Esther felt vulnerable,
 incapable, disadvantaged.

Sure she was in an important position.
 But that didn’t make her feel secure.

It was only when she took a risk for her people
That she would begin to realise
just how privileged, capable, and powerful she was.

But if Esther was invited to tackle her fears
And take a risk for her people
We are invited to tackle our own worries
As take risks for those whom Christ claims as his own:

The hungry, the thirsty, the stranger.
The naked, the sick, the imprisoned.

We may think we are unable to do anything for these people.
We may not have the faintest idea how to help them.
But when we step out in faith
We may find ourselves more powerful
Than we ever imagined.

PAUSE

Amy and I have made new friends through the girls dance classes.
One family lives on an acreage on the other side of Savonna.
The dad's apprenticing as a baker.
Mom works for an MLA.

They invited us to hang out with them a couple Saturday's back.
They were having an open house of sorts.

You see their 12-year-old son Lochlan
has this Christmas tradition called 'Hungry Tummies'.
He hosts an annual fundraiser for the food bank.

To help him with his project

The family was offering fresh coffee and fresh donuts
To everyone who stopped by to make a donation.

The other day I asked how things were going.

Mom said that Lochlan was a little discouraged.
He had lost some momentum in the project,
Since they changed neighborhoods.

She went on to tell me that so far he's raised \$360 in cash
And 300 lbs of non-perishables.

By comparison when a group of 80 people had their food drive
operating with two teams at two locations,
complete with media involvement,
they raised a little over \$2000 in cash
And around 200 lbs of food.

All to say that this young person,

Is definitely punching above his weight.
A boy of only 12 years is showing himself
To be quite capable and powerful.

I wonder what we might accomplish both individually and collectively
If we decided to take similar risks.

We certainly would do a lot of good for God's kingdom,
And we might just discover some important truths
about ourselves.

ⁱ Margaret Wentz "How privileged are you? Take this test to find out" July 29, 2017 *The Globe and Mail*
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/how-privileged-are-you-take-this-test-to-find-out/article35826989/>

ⁱⁱ R. P. Nettelhorst *The Bible's Most Fascinating People* 124

ⁱⁱⁱ Esther 4:11 MSG

^{iv} Amy Oden "Commentary on Esther 4:1-17" www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2239