

Wayside Presbyterian Church

Gray, GA

9.30.18

Our Old Testament scripture today comes from Esther chapter 7, verse 1-6. I am reading from the New Revised Standard Version:

1 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. **2** On 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." **3** Then 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. **4** For 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." **5** Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?" **6** Esther said, "A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

Esther has been through a lot in the last couple days. She has had to throw several banquets, and she is playing the long game in this request. She knows that this is her final chance to ask the king her petition and her request. She has thrown a banquet already for the king and for Haman. And Haman has already plotted to kill all of Esther's people. She is clearly playing the long game, and she knows her time is running out.

Let's look at the facts here - Haman has plotted to kill the Jews because he is angry with Mordecai. Mordecai, who is Esther's cousin- has adopted Esther as a daughter- called Esther to take a stand. To stand with her people and defend them before the King. The king has offered multiple times to give Esther anything she wants- even to half his kingdom, because she is the most beautiful woman in the kingdom. Esther has thrown not one, but 2 banquets before telling the king what she wants from him. She has the ability to take up to half the kingdom, but

instead she asks very simply: “If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request.”

He has offered her anything thing in the land, up to half his kingdom. Instead of taking anything material, or taking more power, she asks for the lives of her people. If her people were “simply” sold into slavery as she said , she would not have complained. Eventually, her people could have gained their freedom, they could fight their way out of slavery if that was what Haman had condemned them to. However, in this moment, her people were being sold to be killed. Esther and Mordecai can not assume they will be okay in the long run. There is no more time for waiting for the long run to work out. Esther is fighting for her people right now. And the King had no idea that her people were being persecuted by Haman. Esther is spending time to make sure the king and Haman will grant her petition, and her request. She is playing the long game in making sure she saves her people.

Have you ever had to play the long game like Esther? Maybe there was a moment when you knew that there was something or someone worth fighting for. I’m not implying that you may have had to fight for the fate of your people, but at some point, most of us have had to play the long game for something we really wanted. Maybe parenting your kids has been your “long game”. I know my own parents have spent quite a long time finding out if my siblings and I have been raised correctly. Maybe your education is your “long game”. For example- if you told me 5 years ago that I would willingly walk into a 4 year grad program, I never would have believed you. Maybe every day at work is a long game for you, waiting for retirement, or simply waiting for that one really annoying coworker to leave your office while you’re trying to work.

I have a hard question though-

What is your petition, and what is your request?

What are you fighting for hard enough that you are risking your life for it? This weekend, we heard many voices weighing in on the question of one someone being believed for a sexual assault that happened decades ago. Both of the people in the debate have been risking their lives to say their peace. Every day on the news, we hear stories of people fighting for social justice, from both sides of the lines. Everyone is playing these long games, because they all care so much about the outcome.

So- what is your petition? And what is your request?

Esther used her petition and her request to fight for the justice of her people. But she isn't just risking **their** lives, if she were to be unsuccessful. Even by approaching the king in this way, she is risking **her** life. If the king had not wanted to see her or had not called for her- he had every right and reason to have her killed. But instead, when she is seen, he accepts her into the court. And she plays the long game to fight for her people.

Who are your people?

Who are you willing to fight for enough to risk your life?

What is your petition? What is your request?

Maybe this group of people is your family. I know for me, I would do anything for my family.

There have been times when my friends had to be the people I was fighting for. There have been times when I've been the strong one of the group, fighting for the justice of others. And there have been times when they have been fighting for me.

Sometimes the people I am fighting for are people that I don't know at all. There are women who are forced into marriage under age, simply because of customs in their countries. There are people who live in poverty in our own country because they can't climb out of a hole our society has placed them in. There are people who are abused by their partners. I don't know these people. But someone must fight for them.

What is your petition? What is your request?

When you think of that group that you are willing to fight for, when you think of the group of people that you would risk your life for, I have a question for you. Why is that group not larger?

What is your petition? And what is your request?

Shouldn't it be that there is justice for all God's people? Wouldn't this world be better if we were all fighting **for** each other instead of **against** each other?

In our New Testament passage today, we hear another version of this idea. We hear the side of what happens if we don't fight for others, or if we cause each other to stumble in the Walk with God. Listen now for the Word of the Lord from Mark 9: 38-50.

38“John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” **39** But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. **40** Whoever is not against us is for us. **41** For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

42 “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. **43** If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. **45** And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. **47** And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, **48** where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

This is the Word of the Lord. ((Thanks be to God.))

What is your petition? And what is your request?

The line that gets me in the Mark passage is: “Whoever is not against us, is for us”. because that is Jesus’ petition in this passage. His request follows immediately after, “For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.” Then goes on to explain why we must advocate for others instead of keeping our own interests in mind. Any act that causes us to simply act for ourselves rather than for others is worse than losing a vital body part.

What would it look like if every single person was petitioning for the life of every other child of God? What if every person’s request was for justice to be felt by every other child of God? Not just the ones like us. Not just the ones who agreed with us. Not just the Americans. Not just the Presbyterians in small churches. Not just the people in Georgia. All of God’s children.

Every person has been made in God’s image. If we believe that is true, then we are called to fight for every person. Just as Esther was called to advocate for her people, and save

them from the persecution of Haman, we are called to advocate for God's people. While the Jewish people were being persecuted by Haman, there are people all over our state, our country and our world that are being persecuted by others. We have been called, as Esther was, to fight for the justice of God's people. I'll ask you again:

Who are you willing to risk everything for, even your life?

What is your petition? And what is your request?

If you would, please pray with me-

Loving, and graceful God-

We know we are not always fighting for the justice of your people. We know we often find ourselves focused on the people we know, who agree with our views and our stances. We see your people struggling for justice and we turn our backs. God, help us fight for your children. When we see injustice, to stand and fight, even risking our lives. Send your Spirit upon us so we may do your work and show You to this world.

In your most holy name-

Amen.