



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 16, 2011

Different Gifts, Same Grace - Week 2

Sermon Text: [Esther 4:12-16](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Esther 4:12-16](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 71](#)

Second Lesson: [Philippians 4:10-19](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 2:1-5](#)

### For Such a Time as This

So what did you get on March 19<sup>th</sup> this past year? What did you give? What did you give to your friends? What did you give to the poor? What was the big feast you had? Did you have turkey? Did you have ham? What did you have? Ham probably wouldn't work so well. You have no idea what I'm talking about, do you?

The Book of Esther is written to tell us about how one of the festivals the Jews were to commemorate came about...the Festival of Purim. It has to do with the *pur*, the lot that was cast so that on that day, in their calendar, the Jews would all be put to death. If you want to know how God delivered them, go home and read the nine chapters in the Book of Esther today. You'll find an amazing story of how God works in amazing ways behind the scenes to see to it that what he wants to happen happens. Amazing coincidences that have the Lord's fingerprints all over them.

Because of that, the Jews were to commemorate what on our calendar would be March 19<sup>th</sup> this festival of how God delivered them from annihilation as a people what Haman had plotted against them and how Mordecai was elevated, and how he had served to save God's people and how he made use of Esther, who was willing to speak up to save the people because she took heed of Mordecai's words that maybe the Lord had put her there for such a time as this. Her generosity of spirit...generosity, a word that talks about attitude, was willing to have her put herself on the line so that if she entered the king's presence and he didn't stick out that golden scepter to her, the law said she had to die. That's what she's talking about when she says "If I perish, I perish."

It's amazing how the Lord worked through Mordecai and Esther, *Hadassah* as her Hebrew name was. Yet it's not all that different from how he can work through us, wherever he has placed us, with the spiritual gifts he has given us. He has given them to us and he has placed us where we are in life for such a time as this, the time for us to use our various spiritual gifts that we've been given. That's what we want to think about, for such a time as this. Such a time as this is a time of vision, a time to see what needs to be done, a time not to just go on in the same ruts but actually carry out the task God puts in front of you.

If you look at our lives and you compare our lives, our daily lives, with our grandparents, our great grandparents, whatever case you might want to put, do you think they would look at how we live our day-to-day life and kind of say, "You guys are really pampered. You've got it good" compared to what they had? Do you think they might look at us as

kind of spoiled? We have so much and we still find so much to complain about. Do you think they'd kind of say to us "If you had to work a little harder, you wouldn't have so much time and energy to gripe about everything."

Pampered, spoiled, that could probably describe Esther. King Xerxes got upset with his queen. She didn't behave as a queen should, so he said "Let's find a new one." So they had, not American Idol but the same kind of thing for finding the new queen. They brought in all the virgins from the land that were pleasing to the eye. One of them happened to be Esther. For a year they gave her six months of skin treatment, not a day at the spa, but six months of skin treatment. Six months of perfumes and different things. A whole year so that when she walked in that room she could be as beautiful as she could be and look and smell the part of a queen that would rule over the kingdom.

She was the one that was chosen. She became queen. Mordecai told her to hide the fact that she was a Jew. That becomes important in the story because it led to her putting herself on the line. She was pampered. She was spoiled. But it wasn't always that way in her life. She had grown up as an orphan. She was raised by her cousin Mordecai. She was a captive living in a foreign land, so it wasn't like her life was entirely all smells and spices, but the Lord got her to that place at that time.

Being pampered, that's something we all like, right? We all like it if we get noticed and appreciated. We all like it if we get spoiled. We'd all love to have someone notice us and say "Man, you've done a great job. Here's a gift certificate to go to the spa. Here's a bonus from the boss. Here's this. Here's that." In fact, when we don't get it, you and I are probably prone to go splurge on something someplace sometime because, after all, we deserve it, right? That's kind of where we live. We deserve it. We've earned it. We deserve it.

There probably came a point in time when Esther probably thought that, just like you and I do. It's all about us. She's now living the good life. It's good to be a queen. This Amalekite, Haman, has a problem with Mordecai because Mordecai won't bow to him. Mordecai won't bow to him, not because it's against his religion. He bowed to those that were over them as a king or things like that. It's because Haman was an Amalekite and he was a Jew. The Amalekites were the first to attack the Jews after they left Egypt (but you probably remember all that from Bible history, right?). There was this life-long animosity and these two were spitting tacks at each other every time they walked by each other. Haman got sick of it, so he came up with this plan and he got the king to give him a signet ring and say "Write whatever edict you want." So he said "On this day on which the lot fell, all the Jews can be killed. You can kill them. It's open season on Jews. You don't need a tag. You don't to just get your limit. Kill as many as you want, and take everything they have. You are free to do that."

So Mordecai is troubled. He goes to Esther and says, "Don't think just because you're pampered, spoiled little queen girl that this edict will not encompass you. If you remain silent at this time thinking it's good to be queen, it's good to be pampered, and you don't want to put yourself on the line, don't think that God won't take care of us some

other way, but you and your household and your family will disappear from the face of this earth, because you are the end of it. The rest of us will be killed.”

Those are pretty strong words from Mordecai. Sometimes it takes pretty strong words to snap us out of our “it’s all about us” kind of stupor, doesn’t it? Sometimes we need a fellow believer to point out the fact that it’s not all about us.

These words aren’t all that different. Mordecai’s words that say “don’t think it’s all about you. It’s really all about how God has put you here so that you can serve him right here and right now with the gifts he’s given you,” they aren’t all that different from the words that Holy Spirit had Paul write right before that section of Romans that we’ve been reading at the start of every worship service the last few weeks. In Verse 3, right before what we start reading, he says “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” It kind of sounds like “get over yourself,” doesn’t it? Don’t think these gifts are just given so that you can be patted on the back or that someone else should use their gift to encourage you or someone else should be showing mercy to you. Think of yourself with sober judgment. Don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought. God has given you these gifts, so you serve him, because it’s all about him; it’s not all about you.

In fact, go through the whole New Testament. Look at Jesus and Paul and Peter and James and John and all the other guys, look at how many times they say “one another” or “others” or “each other.” It’s over 150 times. God is quite serious about trying to teach us it’s not all about us. He’s trying to give us the vision to see it’s all about using our gifts to serve one another no matter what the cost might be to us. If I perish, I perish. If I lose a friend, I lose a friend. But I want to be faithful to the one who has given me the gifts, so I want to use them.

God might have put you right where you are for such a time as this so that you can use whatever gift he has given you, to serve others and perhaps to save others. Such a time as this is a time of saving.

Think about it. Think about what was at stake. Royal position. Royal name. The royal crown. The royal perks. The royal kingdom. That was all at stake, right? I’m not talking about Esther. I’m talking about the one, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant and becoming fully human. He humbled himself and became obedient to death. Even death on a cross. He had it all. If anyone should have said “it’s all about me,” it would have been Jesus, right? But he didn’t say it’s all about him. He said “It’s all about those who don’t have time for me, who don’t have time to get to know me better. It’s all about those who don’t love me above everything else. It’s all about those who use my name to express their frustration with life. It’s all about those that say one thing and do another. It’s all about them because they can’t save themselves. Only I can save them.”

So he came here, gave up heaven, and put himself on the line because it was a time such as this to do the Father's will and to save filthy rotten sinners like you and like me. And he did it. Just like Esther went in the room and "If I perish, I perish." But when Jesus left heaven, there was no golden scepter to reach out and touch so that he wouldn't be put to death. He knew he would be put to death, but he did it because he loved you, he loved me, and he loved the world.

That's why we talk about Christ's love, our calling. That's his love that saved us. That's his love that gives us a purpose and a reason for living that far exceeds looking at our own belly button thinking about how great we are. It's looking at our God whose greatness is always evidence. You and I, we can look at ourselves and one day we can think we're doing pretty good, but you know doggone well the next day we are going to trip and fall on our face because we are filthy rotten sinners, and we are going to screw up. And as filthy rotten sinners, some of the things we often do is not use spiritual gifts. One of the things we often do is use satanic gifts of discouragement, showing anything but mercy.

Examples: In congregational life, there are those that do, that serve, and we'll install some of them this morning, right? Then there are those that sit back and say they should have served this way or they should have served that way or they're not doing this well enough or they're not doing that well enough. There are those that have the gift of evaluation. By evaluation, just so we are clear in case you were drifting off and you didn't really catch what I'm saying, I'm being sarcastic when I say that. The gift of evaluation is to sit back and whine and complain about everything that everyone else does but not get up and do anything yourself.

We all have a sinful nature, so we all have that gift. We all unfortunately use it at one time or another. Sometimes we use it on those who have the gift of generosity, who are generous in spirit and give of themselves and give and give and don't look for the return of a pat on the back, but they certainly don't want the return of a kick in the backside. Yet that's often what they get from their brothers and sisters in Christ who, when they have a problem with someone who is serving on their behalf, instead of going to them in gentleness and kindness and love and Christian concern and showing mercy saying "you need to do this better or you're not doing this," they talk to one another and then, when no one tells them "Hey, what you're doing isn't right before God. Shut up," they get bolder and bolder and pretty soon they're sitting down at the café or they're sitting down at the bar and telling other people outside of the church "Can you believe how in our congregation so and so doesn't do such and such." When that gets back to the person, that's not a generous spirit that builds one another up.

So those of you that have the spiritual gift of generosity that are willing to put yourself on the line to contribute to the needs of others, maybe this is your "for such a time as this" time to tell those that are talking "have you gone and talked with that person? If you haven't, maybe you ought to just shut up because you aren't doing what glorifies God. You aren't doing what honors the one who lived and died in your place. You aren't doing what he wants you to do, so what you're doing is therefore wrong and a

sin.” “Oh yeah, but I’m right.” I don’t care, and God doesn’t care either. If you aren’t speaking in Christian love, you’re speaking sin.

So maybe our “for such a time as this” moment is to build up those who serve faithfully among us, to acknowledge them, to thank them, not because they need it, but because there are many that don’t. There are many that do the exact opposite and it becomes a burden and not a joy to serve the Lord. Then gifts that God has given to build up his body are lost because people get tired of carrying the weight of others’ evaluation.

Christ’s love covers all the times that each and every one of us here has been an unfaithful evaluator, because we’ve all done it. Christ’s love that led him to the cross took away each and every one of those sins you and I have committed by talking about and not to that person. Christ’s love has washed away that sin so that God remembers it no more. As we struggle with the guilt of what we may have done to one another, focus on that truth. In Christ we stand forgiven.

Maybe our “for such a time as this” moment also is to remind each other of that truth. In Christ we are forgiven. In Christ we can proclaim that forgiveness to one another, and to those that don’t yet know it. That’s what he has put us here for; *for such a time as this*.