This is the third Sunday of Lent. In our sermons series entitled “Called,” we have been learning about how and why God calls people. Two weeks ago, we learned the story of Abraham and how he had to take a leap of faith before the path was revealed to him. Abraham’s call was to “bless all the families of the earth.” Last week, we also learned Moses’ story of God calling him to free God’s people as they prayed for deliverance. Moses’ calling was a response to someone’s prayers.

Today, we are on our third calling story. For that, we are studying the story of Queen Esther. Queen Esther’s calling adds another component to the nature of God’s calling: to do what is right.

Esther’s story is found in the book named after her in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Book of Esther tells the story of a Jewish woman named Esther who becomes queen of Persia and saves her people from destruction. Esther was an orphan brought up by her cousin, Mordecai.

The story begins with King Ahasuerus throwing a grand banquet and displaying his wealth to his guests. He then ordered his queen, Vashti, to appear before him, but she refused, and the king banished her. To find a replacement, the king held a beauty contest to find a new queen, and Esther was chosen. However, as privileged as this new position was, Esther had to deal with a capricious king prone to pride, drunken parties, and inebriated decision-making. In addition, she had enemies within. As queen, she faced the most challenging times, and her character and faith were tested as she overcame the threat of death. Here is her story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JydNSlufRIs>

What an exciting story! Not for nothing, Esther is one of the most exciting stories in the Bible. It is a gripping tale of danger, with the Jewish people facing destruction at the hands of their enemies. It is also full of suspense as Queen Esther risked her life to save her people and unexpected plot twists, such as the banishment of Queen Vashti, the rise of Esther to become queen, and the hanging of Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

But the highlight of the book is how it deals with important themes of faith and justice, as Esther and Mordecai trusted in God’s providence and worked to protect their people from harm.

As noted in the video, it was Mordecai who encouraged Esther to use her position as queen to intervene and stop the plot to kill their people. She initially hesitated, knowing that approaching the king without being summoned could result in her death, but she ultimately decided to risk her life to save her people. A key passage that underlines this is Esther 4:13-14,

“Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, 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.”

These are Mordecai’s words. Thirty days have passed since the king requested her presence. Esther did not know what to expect if she showed herself uninvited before this fickle king. But Mordecai reminded her that she was in danger just as much as her people were and that God had positioned her in this place at this moment in time to save many lives. She had to decide, was she going to make the hard choice and stand up and take the challenge, or was she going to miss the opportunity to serve God by doing the right thing? So, she replied to Mordecai,

“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

With this answer, Esther showed her true colors. She risked her life approaching the king and speaking up for her people. Despite the potential consequences, she trusted God’s providence and was willing to stand for what was right. She was selfless in her willingness to risk her own life to save her people. She placed the needs of others before her own and showed courage to make personal sacrifices for the greater good. Esther also demonstrated faith in God’s providence as she fasted and prayed before approaching the king, seeking God’s guidance and wisdom in her actions—precisely the kind of thing we are invited to do during Lent.

So, what does Esther teach us about God’s calling and our own? First, Esther’s story invites us to discern our calling by reminding us that God can use us in unexpected ways and places. Remember, Esther was an orphan and a foreigner, but God led her to a position of influence and power to save her people. Esther’s story also challenges us to be willing to take risks and step out in faith to fulfill God’s calling. Esther knew that speaking up for her people could have cost her life, but she was willing to take that risk to obey God. Finally, Esther’s story challenges us to seek God’s guidance and wisdom in discerning our calling. As opposed to Abraham’s and Moses’ calling, Esther did not have a supernatural encounter with God of any kind but sought God’s guidance as she fasted and prayed for God to give her the courage and wisdom she needed to save her people. Her calling did not come from a burning bush but from seeing the needs of those around her and taking the responsibility of doing something about it.

How does this relate to us? Many people wait for God to speak to them to give them a calling when the answer is right there, in becoming aware of a need and knowing that meeting the need is doing the right thing. Could this be you? Have you been waiting to hear God’s voice speak your calling when, all this time, God has given you opportunities to be a blessing?

If we could resume all this into one lesson, it would be that one person, led by God’s wisdom through one action or one conversation, can change the trajectory of another person’s life—or the trajectory of an entire people or nation. Now think how significant it is for us to listen to God, pay attention to the needs around us, and assume our calling faithfully. What blessings are we withholding by prolonging living out God’s calling for us?

My friends, we all have opportunities to make a difference, and Esther’s story encourages us to do so in several ways. Think about how God has blessed you with resources, skills, abilities, and the relationships and influence you have with others. Even if you don’t audibly hear God’s voice, how is God leading you, calling you, to use these skills and resources to benefit others and meet many needs? Using who we are and what we have to bless others is the work of being the hands and feet of Jesus; it is the work of building the Kingdom of God in our homes and our community.

So, it is clear that God took hold of Esther’s heart as she became aware of the needs of her people. She faced her fears and made her choice. She opted to join her people no matter the consequences. Why? Because it was the right thing to do. Because her heart was led by God’s heart. Because doing is right is doing what is godly. Our calling is not only a matter of personal fulfillment but also of personal and social responsibility.

As Methodists, we believe that being a Christian leads us beyond the walls of a church building and into the world to make it a better place—which is always right. That is what our calling is ultimately all about: doing the right thing “for such a time as this.”

Here is the invitation and the good news: Are you fighting to do what is right, against your calling? Are you trying to avoid the places or people where God is calling you to serve? Are you squandering opportunities to make things better? If God can use people like Abraham, Moses, and Esther, a young Jewish woman in a foreign land, God can use anyone.

I invite you today to assume your calling and use your gifts and talents to make a positive difference in the world. Look around and see what is missing because that may be your calling.