

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon preached at
Stouffville United Church by
the Rev. Captain Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“Why Opportunities Are Missed”

June 18, 2023

Esther 4

Why Opportunities are missed. Well, being in the hospital can be one reason.

Max Lucado, in his book, *In the Eye of the Storm*, tells the story of Chippie the Parakeet. Some of you will have heard this story before but I want to share it with you again this morning, knowing that it will be new to some. Lucado begins with these words:

"Chippie the Parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, blown over. The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean his cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. At that same moment, the phone rang, and without thinking, she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said 'hello' when 'sssopp!' Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie—still alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was now soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted Chippie with a burst of hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied after some thought, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore—he just sits and stares." (Adapted from Joe la Rue, quoting Max Lucado, "In the Eye of the Storm," www.sermoncentral.com)

Esther, had been thrown into a tumultuous situation. She had been made queen after the previous one had been exiled. Xerxes had lost the invasion of Greece and returned to a weakened rule. An assassination attempt was thwarted and now, Haman had conspired to say that the Jewish people were a threat to Xerxes and thereby potentially removing another Queen who had grown to be loved by the people and gaining influence.

No one would be surprised if Esther needed some time to sort out what to do in the face of this threat.

Up to now we have seen over the last four weeks, Xerxes took center stage in chapter one, Mordecai in chapter two and Haman in chapter three. Chapter four and following is where we see Esther steal the show. Her finest hour was not winning the crown, ascending the throne, living as royalty, enjoying fine things and making herself respectable, but rather we will see it was making her life count and making her presence felt by not missing the opportunity in front of her.

Opportunities are often missed because the person fails to **remember where they're from**. *4:1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. 2 But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. 4 When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. (Es 4:1-4)*

Opportunities to make a difference can often be missed because of being comfortable with the way things are. Esther, already had everything, why would she risk everything especially for people she didn't even know. That's always been the question.

Esther knew the answer. Esther never forgot who she was. She never forgot where she came from. She didn't take for granted her success in life or the person – in this case Mordecai – who had been there for her. She appreciated all the sacrifices that he and her family had made for her in the past; and they took pride in her success and didn't clamor after her attention or tried to use her for their personal gain. However, now things had gone wrong and she had heard about the panic and the persecution that was coming; the terror and fear that her people were feeling. She could have stayed safe and sound where she was. She could have ignored their plight except for one thing; she remembered where she came from. This could just as easily have been her. "There but by the grace of God go I."

The story behind that most familiar phrase was said to of been "first spoken by the English evangelical preacher and martyr, John Bradford (circa 1510–1555). He is said to have uttered the variant of the expression - "There but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford", when seeing criminals being led to the scaffold. He didn't enjoy that grace for long, however. He was burned at the stake in 1555, although, by all accounts he remained sanguine about his fate and is said to have suggested to a fellow victim that "We shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night'." (The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations)

NBA player Michael Redd, Milwaukee Bucks' 43rd pick in the 2000 NBA draft, barely made the draft but was the Bucks' leading scorer (11th best in the NBA). Redd then signed a six-year deal for \$91-million. His dad, however, was not ready for what his son bought him next.

Redd's father James worked at the Pepsi Cola plant Monday through Friday, and at church on Sunday. The father had studied to become a minister, founded a church in 1991 and preached to 25 congregants on Sundays. The former location was a store in a strip mall, and later the congregation moved to the basement of another area church. One day, James predicted, they'd trade up to something above ground.

The son ambushed his father by buying him a church building seating 500 people in a prime piece of church property worth millions of dollars in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio, complete with steeple and stained glass windows. The teenage Michael had promised his dad, "Dad, if I get to the NBA I'm getting you and mom a new house and a new building for you to have a church." His father, Pastor James W. Redd, says, "Every now and then you catch yourself drying tears." Michael teased his father. "He wasn't sure (I would do it). I'd tell him, 'Oh, ye of little faith. The Lord, he gave me life. What I did was to give it right back to Him. That's the least I could do, is buy a building for a church. The very least I could do.'"

II

Opportunities are often missed because the person fails to remember where they're from and secondly, **they fail to remember who's with them.** *4 When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. 7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. (Est 4:4-8)*

Mordecai wanted to know if Esther was with them. Esther heard of Mordecai's distress and sent cloths to him. He rejected clothes, and the comfort but wanted Esther to know about his distress over the danger that they were all about to face. (v 5). Mordecai needed Esther to join the fight and remember that if she did she was not alone in this fight. He needed her to remember who was with her.

During World War II millions of buildings were destroyed by exploding bombs and artillery shells. Homes, office buildings, factories, schools, hospitals, and of course, a number of churches suffered the devastation. Of one such church, nothing was left standing except a statue of Jesus with His arms stretched out. But the bombing had damaged the statue and the hands had been blown off.

After the war was over, when it came time to rebuild, some of the townsfolk wanted to have the statue repaired but the congregation of the church would not let them. They looked at the statue of Jesus standing there, arms reaching out, ready to embrace a hurting world and offer new hope, and they said, "This statue of Jesus, with hands missing, will reminds us that we are to be His hands in this world. If the hungry are going to be fed, we are the ones that will need to feed them. If the naked are to be clothed, we are the ones who must clothe them. If the needs of the poor are to be taken care of, it will be us who must care for them."

III

Opportunities are often missed because the person fails to remember where they're from, who's with them, and **why they're here.** *9 Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." 12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"*

Mordecai never questioned that God would intervene to help them. However, he had a sense that perhaps God had placed Esther in this position for just such a time, and just such an opportunity, and just such a purpose. However, he needed her to understand this. He needed her to grasp it.

A truck driver was hauling a load of 500 penguins to the zoo. Unfortunately, his truck broke down. He eventually waved down another truck and offered the driver \$500 to take the penguins to the zoo.

The next day the first truck driver got his truck fixed and drove into town and couldn't believe his eyes! Just ahead of him he saw the second truck driver crossing the road with the 500 penguins waddling single file behind him. He jumped out of his truck, ran up to the guy and said, "What's going on? I gave you \$500 to take these penguins to the zoo!"

To which the man responded, "I did take them to the zoo. But I had enough money left over so now we're going to the movies."

He didn't quite grasp what he was supposed to be doing. And that is the problem isn't it. We don't always grasp what we are supposed to be doing.

IV

Opportunities are often missed because the person fails to remember where they're from, who's with them, why they're here and **what action to take**.

15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." 17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions. (Est 4:15-17)

The root of opportunity is port, meaning the entryway by water into a city or place of business. In earlier days, when the tide and winds were right and the port opened, it allowed entry to do commerce, to visit, or to invade and conquer. But only those who recognized the opening could take advantage of the open port, or opportunity. *Taken from Stephen R. Covey "Foreword," in Kevin Hall, Aspire: Discovering Your Purpose Through the Power of Words (New York: William Morrow, 2009), xii.*

Bob Hoskins -the British actor who played in films like Roger Rabbit, Hook ,Super Mario Bros, Enemy at the Gate- began his career as an actor quite by accident. It's reported that Hoskins was in a theatre, in the West End of London, and was having a drink at the bar while he waited for a friend who was building some stage scenery for a forthcoming production.

As he sat at the bar a man came up to him and said, "Okay, it's your turn." Hoskins, somewhat puzzled, looked up and replied, "Sorry?" The man then answered, "You're up next. Follow me." "For what?" said Hoskins. "For the audition of course, that's what you're here for isn't it?" Hoskins smiled to himself and staying quiet about the real reason for his being there, he played along and took part in the audition. The producers were so impressed with the result that they offered Bob Hoskins the leading role in the play! And so began a very distinguished career. - (R. Ian Seymour, excerpt from Discover Your True Potential)

Esther recognized that this was an important opening where she would be given a chance to save her people. And with such an important opportunity she knew she had to respond even if it was going to cost her. As Thomas Edison said, Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. You think about that. Amen.