

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

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“Steps in Bringing Change”

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Esther 5

https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=jSTzd8_d-BM

Once a man was walking along a beach. The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. Off in the distance he could see a person going back and forth between the surf's edge and the beach. Back and forth this person went. As the man approached, he could see that there were hundreds of starfish stranded on the sand as the result of the natural action of the tide. The man was stuck by the apparent futility of the task. There were far too many starfish. Many of them were sure to perish. As he approached, the person continued the task of picking up starfish one by one and throwing them into the surf.

As he came up to the person, he said: "You must be crazy. There are thousands of miles of beach covered with starfish. You can't possibly make a difference." The person looked at the man. He then stooped down and picked up one more starfish and threw it back into the ocean. He turned back to the man and said: "It sure made a difference to that one!"

There is an old Hebrew saying that states, "Save a life, change the world". It is based on a passage from the Talmud that states: "Whoever saves a single life in Israel is considered by Scripture to have saved the whole world". This saying reflects the Jewish belief that human life is sacred and precious, and that every person is created in the image of God.

The saying also implies that saving a life has ripple effects that benefit the entire world, as each person has a unique contribution to make.

Esther wasn't just thinking of all those who would be lost. She was thinking of one person – that one person who had changed her life. The one person who had saved her life and so changed her world and potentially the world in which they all lived.

This passage reminds us that everyone one of you are of value to God and impact the lives of everyone around you.

Esther is a compelling story to share but a difficult passage to preach, especially from Esther 5 on. We do not have a social agenda and we are not in a war, a revolution or anarchy. What are the principles and implications for us today? As believers we are meant to be agents of change regardless of time, place and event. Rarely can we sit on the sidelines, but how can we change things? What is our role in times of unrest or peace?

I

When dealing with change the first step is to **be prudent**. *5:1 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. 2 When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his*

hand. So, Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. 3 Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." 4 "If it pleases the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him." 5 "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do what Esther asks." (Est 5:1-5)

A certain man had invited the pastor and his wife for dinner, and it was little Joey's job to set the table. But when it came time to eat, Joey's mother said with surprise, "Why didn't you give Mrs. Brown a knife and fork dear?" "I didn't think I needed to," as everyone listened as Joey explained, "I heard Daddy say she always eats like a horse."

The young couple invited their elderly preacher for Sunday dinner. While they were in the kitchen preparing the meal, the minister asked their son what they were having. "Goat," the little boy replied. "Goat?" replied the startled man of the cloth, "Are you sure about that?" "Yep," said the youngster. "I heard Dad say to Mom, 'Today is just as good as any to have the old goat for dinner.'"

A couple invited some people to dinner. At the table, the mother turned to her six-year-old daughter and asked her to say the blessing. "I wouldn't know what to say," she replied. "Just say what you hear Mommy say," the mother said. The little girl bowed her head and prayed, "Dear Lord, why on Earth did I invite all these people to dinner?" [08]

Esther faced a life-threatening challenge, but she did not give up or despair. She was prudent in her response to the challenge in front of her.

She turned to God in prayer and fasting and relied on his power and providence. She knew that God had a purpose for her life, and that he could use her for his glory.

We may not face the same kind of threat as Esther did, but we may face other challenges that test our faith and courage. Like Esther you may face opposition or feel you are facing injustice or oppression in our society. Or you may be facing a personal or family problem that seems overwhelming. In these situations, we are reminded that we can trust God as our refuge and strength. We can seek his will and direction through prayer and fasting. We can remember his promises and faithfulness in his words. We can believe that he is working all things together for good of those who love him.

II

When dealing with change be prudent and secondly, **be peaceful**. We saw Esther show restraint in chapter 5. She could have lashed out at that moment demanding Haman's be arrested. Yet she didn't.

Having prayed and fasted and done what she could Esther was at peace as she met with the King; meanwhile Haman was plotting in anger to rid himself of Mordecai.

Gordon MacDonald talks about meeting a man who had been imprisoned for five years with the great South African president and leader, Nelson Mandela, on Robben Island. The man and Mandela had rooms next to each other. Gordon MacDonald eagerly asked the man what the great Nelson Mandela had taught him. The man answered, "He taught me to forgive. I was a bitter young man and Mandela picked it up immediately when we first met. He said to me, 'Son, you are no use to our movement until you learn to forgive the white man. You can hate his cause, but you cannot hate him.'" (Gordon MacDonald, "A Resilient Life," p. 187, Nelson 2004)

Thomas a Kempis said, "When anger enters the mind, wisdom departs."

III

When dealing with change be prudent, peaceful, and finally, **but have a plan.** “. 3 *Then the king asked, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.”* 4 *“If it pleases the king,” replied Esther, “let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.”* 5 *“Bring Haman at once,” the king said, “so that we may do what Esther asks.”* (Est 5:1-5)

Esther showed she could use her influence and position for good. Esther was going to use her role as queen to save her people from destruction. She did not hide or deny her identity as a Jew. She did not use her power for selfish gain. She used her opportunity to speak up for justice and mercy.

We may not have the same kind of influence or position as Esther did, but we all have some sphere of influence in our lives. We all have some gifts and talents that God has given us. We all have some opportunities and responsibilities that God has entrusted us with.

It has been said those who aim at nothing are sure to hit it. If you stand for nothing, you will fall for anything, and if you fail to plan you plan to fail.

British sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein was once visited in his studio by the eminent author and fellow Briton, George Bernard Shaw. The visitor noticed a huge block of stone standing in one corner and asked what it was for.

"I don't know yet. I'm still making plans."

Shaw was astounded. "You mean you plan your work. Why, I change my mind several times a day!"

"That's all very well with a four-ounce manuscript," replied the sculptor, "but not with a four-ton block."

Kevin Shelton tells the story of an elderly woman, who resided next to an affirmed atheist, in an older suburb. This woman, he notes, received a meager social security survivor's benefit. Although, her finances only afforded her not even the most basic meal plans, daily she would open her windows and listen to hymns and give thanks praise to God.

Finally, one day, the middle of the month arrived, and she had not received her check. Instead of complaining, opened her window breathed in the wonderful morning air prayed and thanked God for the day. The neighbor was sitting on his porch and overheard her praying "Lord although I don't have any food in my home, I know you will provide!" The neighbor thought to himself, "This is a great opportunity to prove to her there is no god". So, he hurriedly went to the store and purchased a carload of groceries.

Upon arriving home, he placed them on her porch, rang her doorbell and hid in the bushes to spring his surprise. Finally, the elderly woman made her way to the door. She opened the door, saw all the groceries and rejoiced in the Lord! Then, says Pastor Shelton, about that time the neighbor jumped out from behind the bushes and exclaimed. "God is not real; I bought those groceries there." To this the old woman exclaimed, "I knew my God would supply my needs, but I didn't know he would make the devil pay for them!"

Esther had a plan to make the devil in her life pay. And if you want to know how and how to benefit from her knowledge you will just have to come back in August. Then you can learn as David Brinkley "Lay a foundation with the bricks that others throw at you." you think about that. Amen