

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

“Everyday Heroes”

August 20, 2023

Esther 7

Everyday heroes. Who were the hero's here? Perhaps everyone. We hear a lot about being the hero of your own life, but much for then that, everyday heroes affect life.

Everyday heroes are people who make a positive difference in the world through their actions, big or small. They are not necessarily famous or powerful, but they have the courage, compassion and commitment to help others in need. But heroes can also be found in ordinary situations, doing ordinary things to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Some examples of everyday heroes are:

-mechanics and labourers who repair or build, maintain, or improve infrastructure and facilities like our church

- Teachers who inspire and educate their students

- Nurses who care for the sick and injured

- Police and Firefighters, first responders who risk their lives to save others

- Volunteers who donate their time and skills to a cause

- Parents who raise their children with love and support

- every person who in some small or large way makes a life of another better.

Wisdom and discretion accompanied Esther as she approached King Xerxes. However, Haman wearing his pride as it clung to him like a worn out cloak. In this chapter we see that our three characters are engaged in all three positions. Esther uses wisdom, Haman blind with pride still unbowed by his previously dining on humble pie, and the King who searches for a just punishment.

In Gilbert and Sullivan's play "The Mikado", the Japanese Emperor contemplates what it means to find the punishment that fits the crime. And we find at the end of the chapter Haman unwittingly provides that answer.

I

Everyday heroes **face the wrong**. *7:1 So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther, 2 and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted." 3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, O*

king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life-this is my petition. And spare my people-this is my request. 4 For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.” (Est 7:1-4)

According to ancient legend, a woman died and arrived on the banks of the River Styx. She was greeted by Charon, ferryman to the underworld, her guide across the waters to the realm of departed souls. Upon arriving on the other side, Charon invited her—should she so wish—to drink of the waters of the River Lethe, which banked the Elysian fields. These were waters of forgetfulness, whose magic powers would erase all memory of her years on earth.

She asked the boatman, "If I drink this cup, will I forget how much I suffered and the tragedy I experienced?"

"Yes," he replied, "you will forget all sadness, together with your every moment of joy."

"Will I forget my failures?"

"Yes, your failures will evaporate into the mist of oblivion, and your triumphs as well."

"Will I forget the people who neglected and abused me?"

"Yes, those who hurt you will vanish from memory, as will the people who loved you and those you loved in return."

She thought for a moment and then shook her head. "I cannot do that. I will not drink of the waters of forgetfulness. I choose to remember everything."

The time had finally come for Esther to muster her courage and confront the wrong that was being done, and to face the one who was behind it all.

Esther refused to do things behind Haman's back or try to manipulate the king as Haman had done. Instead she bravely faced Haman in the presence of the king.

Quite a few years ago, there had been a contest for the best answer to the question, "What is wrong with the world?" People from all walks of life wrote in with their responses to the question. After a month had gone by the editor of the paper published, what he thought was the best response to the question, "What is wrong with the world?" And it went like this: "Dear Editor, I am. Yours sincerely G.K. Chesterton."

If we are honest with ourselves, the only answer to that question is the one that G.K. Chesterton gave. "I am." It is what I do, and don't do. It is my attitude that ever so subtly chooses to convince myself that doing the wrong thing is ok; or to do the right thing for the wrong reason, or the wrong instead of the right – is somehow ok when it is not. And as a result of our refusing to fess up – arguments are started, relationships strain, battles fought, wars begun and lives lost.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said, "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who is willing to destroy a piece of their own heart?"

It isn't an easy thing to admit as Chesterton did.

II

Everyday heroes face the wrong and **expose the wrong**. 5 King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?" 6 Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman." Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. (Est 7:5-6)

A diner was upset that the waiter had not given him a spoon with his coffee. "This

coffee," he said loud enough for most of the other patrons to hear, "is going to be pretty hot to stir with my fingers."

The waiter embarrassed, made a hasty retreat to the kitchen and returned shortly with another cup of coffee. Beaming, he said, "Sir, here is one that is cold."

The diner was so right, that he was wrong. And the waiter exposed it.

Esther, gathered the evidence she needed to support her claim against Haman and once Mordecai had confirmed made her face the worst she made the decision to risk it all to the expose the wrong.

The fantasy of human perfection or perfectibility lingers even in the face of the Holocaust, and the Gulag, and the invasion of Ukraine. We live in this "groundhog day like" tragedy of having to relearn the experience that evil is universal, pervasive and intractable. The old heresies never die, and seldom fade into nothingness. They just all assume another form in another place.

Editors, dramatists, poets and novelists who kept their sight and wrote of it. Flannery O'Connor wrote a chilling short story called "*A Good Man Is Hard to Find.*", Ray Bradbury borrowed words from Macbeth's witches to share his own premonition that *Something Wicked this Way Comes*, while Spalding Gray sold out a New York Theater by talking about evil, describing it as a cloud that moves over the face of the earth settling here and there now and then, Yesterday in Germany, or Cambodia, Afghanistan, Syrian, today Ukraine; tomorrow who knows? *Lord of the Flies* set up another Eden, and described another Fall.

I remember reading an only copy of Reader's Digest. In one article a Rabbi expressed his disagreement with the modern attitude toward those who do evil things. His complaint was that we have come to regard moral failure as though it were nothing more than a problem for psychology. When someone does wrong, we do not any longer send for a priest, rabbi or minister we find a psychologist to counsel the patient. We do not say that the wrongdoer has done evil or is vile as Esther did. And thereby expose it for what it is or what evil has been done. We say the person is ill. They are sick, not vile, they don't need to accept responsibility but go to therapy. Now, as a Registered Psychotherapist, I know that therapy is beneficial, but not without taking responsibility. This attitude diminishes the evil deed done, and the impact on those for which it was perpetrated.

We watched a few months ago when Paul Bernardo was casually transferred from the maximum security prison to a medium security prison without thought of how that would affect the families of his many victims. Or what it said about what he had done, or what it says about us for cavalierly do it. It was done, simply because he asked. There was no sense in any way that he regrets his evil crimes, only regret he had was for the circumstance of his living arrangements.

When Alexander Solzhenitsyn -a Russian writer and soviet dissident and out spoken critic of Russian oppression, and who helped raise global awareness of the political repression in the Soviet Union said in his acceptance speech for his Nobel Prize; "Governments love darkness because the deeds are evil...Darkness allows us to deal in lies.... And what do you do when the lie is in the world?" He said, "Let the lie come to the world – it may even be triumphant - it may over take the world, but not through me!... For one word of true outweighs the world"

Esther did not hold back. The Queen called Haman "the adversary and the enemy and "vile" (or "wicked").

Everyday heroes face the wrong and, expose the wrong and then **right the wrong.**

7 The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. 8 Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. 9 Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king." The king said, "Hang him on it!" 10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided. (Est 7:7-10)

After twenty years two college rivals bumped into each other. "Do you realize how I used to be so fat and flabby?" asked the first. "Well, I've been on an exercise program for a few years, and now I run marathons." "That's great!" replied the other man.

"And," the first man continued, "Do you remember how I used to be shy, too, and a poor student? Well, I took a course in public speaking, and now I make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year on the lecture circuit." "That's great!" came the reply.

"What about you?" The first man inquired. "Have you changed at all?" "Yes, I have," said the young man. "Remember how brutally honest I used to be and how when someone said something uninteresting, I would reply, 'I couldn't care less?' Well, now I just say, 'That's great!'" (Reader's Digest 1/97)

Righting a wrong requires a willingness to admit and acknowledge the mistake and take responsibility. In the military, it is expected that people will mess up, but avoiding the responsibility, or denying it, is considered far worse than the mess up itself. Messing up sometimes happens, and when it does, fessing up must happen.

A little poem best illustrates this: "There was a crooked man who walked a crooked mile, who found a crooked sixpence upon a crooked style. He had a crooked cat, which chased a crooked mouse, and they all lived together in a little crooked house." Why was everything in this man's life crooked? It was because he was a crook.

If there had been any other way to right the wrong, it was clear that Esther would have done it. But there wasn't.

For as Edmund Burke said, "the only thing that allows evil to flourish is that good people do nothing" And when good people do something a second chance is the result. We all need a second chance.