

Anticipation

Revelation 19:4-9; Esther 8:10-17

We gather at table today to celebrate the fact that inspired Esther and Mordecai and all God's people to celebrate way back in Persia some 500 years before Christ. And the fact we share in common with all God's people there and then is that the essential problem threatening our souls and well-being has been solved. Our passage opens with Mordecai, empowered by his Savior, Xerxes the king, to write with his pen and seal with his signet a gospel to all God's people in Persia how they can be saved on that terrible day nine months in the future on which Haman had scheduled a holocaust against them. And the good news was that their king and savior, Xerxes, was going to be on their side, arming and helping them against the holocaust Haman had scheduled.

So we want to note carefully what we began to notice last week, that Xerxes in his day and Jesus in our day have not provided God's people a gospel which solves all our problems or absolves us from the necessity for struggle. To the contrary, all Mordecai's proclamation promised was that on the day of battle still facing them, still scheduled for their future, on that day the power and authority of the Savior king would be with them in a way that would win them salvation and victory.

And the reason we should pay attention to this is that, 500 years after Xerxes, our King and Savior, Jesus, made promises to us that speak of a future full of struggles and heart break, but Jesus will be there, supplying enough goodness and wisdom and strength to win our salvation and victory through on the battlefield still facing us, the struggle still scheduled for our future.

The very day Jesus promised his apostles *"the keys to the kingdom..."*, he also said to them, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life [in this world] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul. Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul."* Paradoxically, Jesus' disciples both gave up everything they had to follow him...and Jesus promised to return it to them a hundred times over ...in this life!

But how does that work? How do we sacrifice all those things we would have had, if we were not bound to Christ, and still gain one hundred times over what following Christ costs us. Well, Paul attempted that math in a particularly dangerous and heartbreaking season of life. He writes in his Second Letter to the Corinthians about being *"...afflicted in every way, but not crushed, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed..."* and he goes on to explain that he

wins, he gets saved only “...as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are not seen.”

In other words, Paul approached the battle, endured the heartbreak, believing that Jesus the Savior King was with him, and that Paul’s salvation and victory were secured even though the worst of the battle was still ahead. So in our passage this morning, Mordecai leaves the presence of the king dressed in fine linen, dressed for a royal banquet exactly as Jesus promised we will be dressed in heaven when we are resurrected to take our seats at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. But the problem with Mordecai’s grand gesture, his elaborate fashion show, is that it’s way too early for that!

The battle Mordecai set up for God’s people to win was still nine months in the future when Mordecai dressed for a victory parade. And the point of the gesture, the truth this passage of the book of Esther was meant to teach is that, in God’s kingdom, all worship is about anticipation.

Every Communion we hold is a dress rehearsal for the day we will rise from our graves and file into our seats dressed in the finery that our Savior Jesus provides us so that our souls will fit the occasion of our Beloved becoming ours and taking away from everything that wounds and frustrates and confuses and overwhelms us. Once Christ has returned, our struggle will be over, once we are with him the brokenness of our relationships and circumstances will be sorted and healed in such a way that they will never break our hearts again. And our job now is to make like Mordecai and dress for the occasion in advance of the day.

Dressing our souls and living our lives as if heaven is where we must end up is an exercise in looking “...not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are not seen.” Do we believe that we can be forgiven now and that our Savior can save us in our struggles now? Are we willing to give up our worldly wants and need for what Christ promised us is a hundred times more valuable? Shall we examine ourselves as we approach his table here and now as to whether we believe his promise to get us to his table there and then.