

**“For Such A Star As This”**  
**Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22**  
**San Dimas Community Church, United Church of Christ**  
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**October 1, 2006**

In the United Church of Christ we have a broad range of beliefs and we try to honor diversity in points of view. Dan Romero, one of our conference ministers, says the UCC is like an umbrella with very different folks standing underneath. I add to this metaphor that the important thing is that we come out of the rain together from under the umbrella and that we don't kick out others with whom we disagree.

One example where folks in the UCC may differ is on how the world was created. We have people who believe the world was made in six days and others who believe in evolution. Scientists who believe in evolution say that if we go way back to the stars that were formed from the “Big Bang,” we discover that it is inside the center of these stars that the earth's chemicals were made. When these stars went supernova, they sent forth clouds of dust, stardust, from which Planet Earth and our bodies evolved. *Perhaps* you and I come from stardust; or as the writer of Genesis put it, “the Lord God made humankind from dust....” I find the poetry of this rather stunning and beautiful.

Once there was a woman, Esther, whose name means ‘star’. I told the children the first part of her story, the part that includes her Uncle Mordacai's words: “Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the kingdom for just such a time as this.”(4:13-14). It is this courageous Queen Esther who dares to enter the King's presence risking her own death; this Queen who says, “If I perish, I perish” that we remember from scripture.

Whether Esther would be considered scripture at all was greatly debated when it was decided which books would be in and which would be out of the holy text. After all, nowhere in Esther is God even mentioned. Nonetheless, Esther's star, the vision for her life was to claim her identity as a Jew, which she had hidden in silence; and in risking her life to reveal who she was, she found her purpose in life. Esther became queen for just such a time as this, for such a star as this, to be a light of justice to her people.

But the lectionary leads us to the “rest of the story”; a story that shows us the ambiguity of power even when power is employed for a “just” cause. At least *I think* it would have been quite enough for Esther to get the king to punish Haman and then to protect the Jews from the decree of death. But Esther goes further and asks the king to allow the Jews one more day to kill their enemies, a sort of preemptive strike against any possibility of their being persecuted in the future. What follows are vengeful actions that are hard to read about. This is one of the reasons that many early Christians did not accept Esther as being part of the Bible: you don't hear Jesus asking for “just one more day to kill some more people.” But Esther lived in her time and place and the Bible records the good, the bad, and the ugly of human existence. What we remember most from this story is this beautiful Jewess queen who risks her life for the sake of her people. And because she was the agent through whom the Jews found deliverance, the holiday of Purim was instituted and celebrated as a time to give gifts, especially to the poor.

You may recall my saying that Esther was King Ahasuerus' second wife. Vashti was his first. She, like Esther, was known for her beauty. One day when the King and his drinking buddies had had a little too much (perhaps they were bragging about the beautiful women they'd known), the King calls for

Vashti to be brought to the party for the sole purpose of displaying her sexual charms. Vashti does an unheard of thing. She refuses. She will not allow herself to be used by another human being even if he is the King. So an embarrassed King asks his sages what to do with this insubordinate wife of his, and they suggest banishment. After all, they argue, if the women of the land hear of Vashti's insubordination, they might not obey their husbands either. So Vashti is banished.

Both Vashti and Esther lived in troubling times. They were bound within structures of power that threatened them. Each in her own way responded to the power of the empire. One woman, Vashti, we never heard about again; Esther, we learn, uses power to bring about justice, deliverance, but also vengeance.

We, too, live in troubling times, when the structures of power are wielded for both good and bad. How, then, do we chart our course? How do we resist the powers that be, powers that would co-opt us for purposes other than God's? Perhaps we might look to the stars, particularly the star of Christ. Long ago, the Magi saw a star and found the way they should go.

Today we seek the light of Christ to lead us, to guide us in the way WE should go in "just such a time as this." How can this starlight shine in our rich country where so many live in poverty? How can the Christ star not be hidden when voices of anxiety create a cloud of fear? How can the Christ star burn bright with hope when vengeance outweighs justice, when fear denies human rights? How can we human beings let the stardust that we are made of shine brightly in a world that has grown cold and dark?

Just perhaps we may not lose our way if we choose such a star as Christ upon which to fix our gaze and never take our eyes off.

In Robert Frost's poem: *Choose Something Like a Star*, he says:

O Star (the fairest one in sight)...  
Say something to us we can learn  
By heart and when alone repeat.  
Use language we can comprehend.  
Tell us what elements you blend.

It asks a little of us here.  
It asks of us a certain height,  
So when at times the mob is swayed  
To carry praise or blame too far,  
We may choose something like a star  
To stay our minds on and be staid.

Today may we be star-struck by the Christ light shining even through the deep darkness of our world. May we remember that the Christ star shines on all people of every land, of every nationality and ethnicity. The world is our neighbor, and there is no other neighborhood to which to escape from those who may make us uncomfortable. We must keep our minds staid on the message of Christ's life and light. Today may we commit ourselves anew to those same purposes for which Christ lived, died, and lives today.

For we are here for such a time as this, for such a vision as this, for such a star as this. AMEN