Theme: Esther—Building Power as Allies

Gathering Music—Choose from list of recommended songs

Leader: As we participate together in reading the Esther text, listen for where there are allies and shared power.

Scripture Reading

Participatory Scripture Reading Note

Divide the audience by characters to respond as noted whenever their name is read during the scripture reading. Give instructions for this at the beginning. Invite a leader to help direct the audience responses, at least initially until they get used to it. Be sure the reader pauses or slows their reading to allow time for responses.

Responses:

Mordecai—“Great uncle!”
King or King Ahasuerus—“All hail the king!”
Hathach, slaves, servants, maids, eunuchs—“Still resisting slavery!”
Esther/Queen—“For such a time as this!”
Haman—“Wicked man!

Esther 5:1-8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Esther creates allies with eunuch, servants, Mordecai, king; Esther’s banquet

Scripture Reader: (remember to pause for the character responses)

5 1 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, opposite the king’s hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne inside the palace opposite the entrance to the palace. 2 As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor and he held out to her the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the top of the scepter. 3 The king said to her, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.”
4 Then Esther said, “If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet that I have prepared for the king.” 5 Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther desires.” So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. 6 While they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, “What is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” 7 Then Esther said, “This is my petition and request: 8 If I have won the king’s favor, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and then I will do as the king has said.”

Leader: We hear in this story that Esther ignores her fear and, empowered by prayer and fasting and resolve, acting on the advice of her allies – Mordecai and the Jewish people in Susa – she steps forward with a plan to save her people. She uses a banquet. A meal shared with her husband, the king, and his trusted advisor, Haman – who also happens to be her worst enemy and the enemy of her people. How often have meals brought together people who might not be friends? How often have gatherings with food helped start conversations that would otherwise have been difficult? Esther is building her relationship with the king. Did she plan two meals? Or was she inspired to do the second while hosting the first? We are not told here but think about how relationships are built and strengthened and nurtured through eating together and talking.

Sing
“We’ve Come This Far By Faith,” Songs of Zion, 192, Abingdon Press

Esther 6:1-3-11 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The King Honors Mordecai

Scripture Reader: (remember to pause for the character responses)

6 1 On that night the king could not sleep, and he gave orders to bring the book of records, the annals, and they were read to the king. 2 It was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had conspired to assassinate[a] King Ahasuerus. 3 Then the king said, “What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?” The king’s servants who attended him said, “Nothing has been done for him.” … 11 So Haman took the robes and the horse and robed Mordecai and led him riding through the open square of the city, proclaiming, “Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor.”

Leader: So, after the meal the king cannot sleep. What did Esther serve? His sleeplessness fostered a thirst for remembering and he recalled how Mordecai had been his ally against
those who plotted to kill him. Wanting to honor this, the king asks Haman for an appropriate way to express his gratitude. Haman was too self-centered to realize his suggestions would honor the very one he hated most. And he found himself at the core of that task. It was the beginning of his undoing.


Esther Petitions the King

Scripture Reader: (remember to pause for the character responses)

6 14 While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman off to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

7 1 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. 2 On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” 3 Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. 4 For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.”[a] 5 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?” 6 Esther said, “A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. 7 The king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him.

Leader: Let us pause for a moment of silence to reflect on this part of Esther’s story.

Leader: Invite brief sharing in pairs, smaller groups or open to the entire group to discuss these questions (on screen): What impact do you think serving not just one, but two meals may have had in influencing the king to lend his ear to Esther and ally with her, Mordecai and her people? How does Esther ask her people to support her? How are they her allies? What qualities of an ally do you notice in the text? Allow 5-10 minutes.

Leader: No work is done in a vacuum. Esther’s story illustrates the role that allies play on both sides. For her, her allies call her to speak out for justice and then support her in her position by prayer and fasting at her request. For the king, Mordecai demonstrates that he is an ally by exposing a plot against Ahasuerus. When the king thinks back upon it, he realizes Mordecai is a friend and someone to be honored for the help he has provided. Haman’s allies, his wife and friends, are supporters of his hatred. They recommend that he use his
power and association with the king to bring about the destruction of someone he hates simply because he will not bow to him. Their support only brings about his demise. Allies make a difference. We need them to do the right thing. We need them because collective power is stronger than individual power. We, as United Methodist Women members and leaders, need to find ways to be allies with people who are on the front lines of injustice. Allies uplift us, remind us of equity and justice and help us keep away from good intentions that unintentionally do harm. The voices from the margins are the ones that help us focus on those things that we might not notice, experience or recognize as injustice in our own lives.

**Closing Prayer** (in unison)

O God, we give you thanks for reminding us, “where two or three are gathered together You are in our midst.” There is power in working WITH each other and with other groups who have the same goals. There is collective power when we join together to fight injustice. There is support in being allies. We see this in Esther’s story – Your story, O God, in the life of Esther. We see this from our membership who are working with groups on the ground to make a difference in the lives of women, children and youth. We hear You call us, God of Queen Esther and Mordecai, for “such a time as this” in our world today. May we go forth in courage and faith. Amen.

**Sing**