Theme: Esther—Preparing for Leadership

Gathering Music

Opening Song

“Heleluyan,” The United Methodist Hymnal, 78

Call to Worship

Leader: Join me as we sing the call to worship together (using hand motions)

Sing

“Wa Wa Wa Emimimo,” The Faith We Sing, 2124

Congregational Prayer

Leader: Creator of the World, we rejoice in Your presence this morning (afternoon, evening, night). Thank You for giving us this (new) day. We are called to hunger and thirst after Your righteousness, a call for us to respond at such a time as this. Guide us, we pray, in the steps we need to take to prepare for leadership. You are our way forward. Amen.

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 4 For Such a Time as This

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

Listen carefully as you hear these familiar words again. Remember that Haman has put into place a plot to kill Mordecai whom he hates, but not Mordecai only. He has set in motion a plan to kill all the Jews in the kingdom. And this is where the scripture begins…

4 1 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; 2 he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 3 In every province, wherever the king’s command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

4 When Esther’s maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. 6 Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate, 7 and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. 8 Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

9 Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, 11 “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days.” 12 When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, 13 Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” 15 Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, 16 “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.” 17 Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.
Leader: Invite pause for a moment of silent reflection. Ask everyone to think about the support Esther has and chose for the task she had.

(Wait a full minute)

Esther’s Support

Leader: As you think about this scripture passage – those of you with Bibles or who have the verses on your tablet or smartphone – discuss together at your table, “What support(s) did Esther have? What were their names, positions and how did they support her? What did she do to prepare for this call to lead for such a time as this?” Allow 10 minutes to discuss.

Leader: When you think about it, this entire conversation between Mordecai and Esther came through their servants, specifically and predominantly Hathach. Interesting, isn’t it? When you consider supports, think how important it is to relay information accurately and reliably. These persons were conduits for this effort and they were trustworthy. Esther says that her maids will fast with her. She calls on all of Susa’s Jews to join her. Mordecai put the pressure on Esther and in that last verse we can see that he “went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.” He was persuasive, assertive with her and then he was cooperative. Esther had the position, Mordecai supported her and they operated in a mutuality based on their individual opportunities and position. Mordecai was there to give information that saved the king in the first place. He was the first to hear about Haman’s evil plot. Esther resigned herself to the task of saving herself, Mordecai and all the Jews. She created a plan with the king. To prepare for it, she fasted and called others to fast with her. Fasting is a spiritual preparation, a discipline of faith. And theirs was a three-day fast – no small thing.

Now take some time at your tables to think about what supports you have. What are the things that you do to prepare for leadership opportunities? Invite them to jot down some personal reflection. (Allow 3 minutes.) Invite brief shout-outs about their supports. (Allow 3 minutes.) Thank persons that shared and invite singing.

Sing

“For Everyone Born,” For Everyone Born, GBGMusik

Activity: Roadblocks

Leader: As we think about the support you have discussed today, about the way in which alliances are built and preparing to lead, take time at your table or in pairs to identify the roadblocks you may encounter as you answer the call to leadership. Write one “roadblock” on the tongue depressor on your table. Be sure to put your name on the back of it. Then take
two clothespins and attach to the sides so that it stands up like a roadblock. When everyone has had a chance to do this, exchange roadblocks with one other person. In these pairs, pray for each other that you might overcome these roadblocks.

(Allow time for writing, exchanging and praying together)

Unison Prayer

(Invite participants to join hands together at the table and pray in unison.)

We have learned about Esther—her call for such a time as this. We also have a call, and opportunity to lead for such a time as this. Help us, God of Esther and Mordecai, God of those chosen and those left out, God of Queens and Kings, God of Servants and Slaves, God of Justice and God of Love. We have learned and listened during our time with each other. We hunger and thirst after Your righteousness to make it manifest for such a time as this. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to seek support, to prepare spiritually, to feed and pray, to respond, to cast away our roadblocks. We covenant with each other to be a support for one another and to seek allies in the days ahead. We are Yours. Live in us we pray. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sing

“We Are Marching in the Light of God/Siyahamba,” The Faith We Sing, 2235

Leader: Go in peace, marching for such a time as this!