



“I’m Getting a Call... What’s The Next Step?”

Embracing Your Call “For Such a Time as This”

Focus: God has placed a call on our lives—and eventually we realize that the call is impossible to ignore! When we recognize, as Esther did, that God is calling us “for such a time as this”, what do we do next? Esther’s next steps—discerning with trusted mentors, prayer, and intentional fellowship with a faith community—can provide us with some guidance as we navigate our response to God’s calling.

General Comments:

- This sermon will—depending on the direction you and the Holy Spirit choose to take it—invite your congregation to ponder:
 - The notion that each person has been uniquely gifted and equipped “for such a time as this”, and that your passions might intersect with the needs of your church, your neighbors, and your community
 - What it means to answer God’s call when the world around you seems especially challenging
 - The next steps you can take in your journey of saying “yes” to God’s call—and how the Great Plains Annual Conference has resources to equip you for the road ahead!
- As you prepare for this week’s sermon, continue to take time to touch base with anyone who might have expressed interest in the notion of call, or anyone who may be responding to an invitation to discipleship. As the series wraps up, consider setting up meeting times with interested individuals for **5 Cups of Coffee**.
- As with prior weeks, consider prayer walking through the sanctuary/worship space prior to the service. As you move through the sanctuary, ask God to speak to the people who will be in that space. Pay attention to any Holy Spirit “nudges” as you dedicate and pray for the space.
- Consider including the teaching points from the Proclamation section in the bulletin for further reflection.

Scripture Selection:

- Esther 4:1-17—The Call of Esther

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; he went up to the entrance of the king’s gate, for no one might enter

the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 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.

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. 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. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, 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. 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 to entreat him for her people.

Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai: "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: 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."

When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, 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. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, 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."

Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, "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." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Outline:

The following sermon has been structured to have the flow of an **AGAPE** sermon. For more on this, check out the model in the book [That'll Preach: 5 Simple Steps to Your Best Sermon Ever](#) by Charley Reeb. The five steps are: (AGAPE) Anticipation—Gospel—Answer—Proclamation—Explosion. An outline is provided that includes research and preaching “helps.” However, it is heavily dependent upon the preacher bringing their own experience to the sermon.

- **Anticipation (Introduction/Hook)**
 - This is the capstone of the worship series, so you might consider opening with the question of **“now what?”** We’ve heard your call story, Samuel’s call story, Abram and Sarai’s call story, and the disciple’s call story—and now Esther’s call story begs the question: *what about you?* **How have you been called “for such a time as this”?** And what are your next steps?
- **Gospel (Scripture)**
 - Spend some time reading and contemplating Esther 4:1-14. Consider the following questions:
 - What do you notice about this text? Are there words or phrases that grab your attention?
 - Put yourself in Esther’s shoes—what would you be feeling in this situation? (Overwhelmed? Fearful? Unqualified?) Imagine her internal dialogue during this experience. You might also do the same for Mordecai, or for the Jewish people of Susa who are crying out for salvation. What do they need from Esther, and how does their call for help inform Esther’s understanding of her call?
 - What does this text tell us about hearing the voice of God? What does it tell us about responding to the voice of God? (Note that Esther is unique in Scripture for being a book where God is never mentioned by name—but God’s work still resonates throughout the text!)
 - How does Esther prepare to answer her call? What roles do her mentor and her community play?
 - Consider reading on through the rest of Esther’s story and reflecting on how she uses her gifts, graces, and the resources at her disposal to intervene for her people.
 - Below are a couple of commentaries that may be helpful in guiding your unpacking of the Scripture:
 - From [Working Preacher](#), by Dr. Amy Oden.
 - From the [blog](#) of Rev. Marci Glass

- **Answer**
 - Go back to the question you used in your “hook.” What wisdom can you glean from this Scripture as you attempt to answer this question?
- **Proclamation**
 - What is the “big takeaway” that you want to communicate to your hearers?
 - Consider incorporating the following points (you could share these in your bulletin, on your Facebook page, or other avenues as well):
 - *You* are called for such a time as this!
 - You are not alone as you respond to your call—God has surrounded you with *mentors, advisors, and a praying community!*
 - *Prayer and mentoring* are a key part of discerning next steps!
- **Explosion (Closing)**
 - You’ve asked a question, you’ve turned to Scripture for an answer, and you’ve proclaimed the Good News—so now what? What are you inviting your congregation to *do* with the story of Esther’s call? This will be for you and the Holy Spirit to discern; below are just a few directions you might explore.
 - This is **the** week to unleash all the Conference resources around call, vocation, and lay ministry!
 - Familiarize yourself with Conference Culture of Call resources: <https://www.greatplainsumc.org/culture-of-call>. Here are some to focus on:
 - <https://www.greatplainsumc.org/HowisGodCalling>
 - <https://www.greatplainsumc.org/5-cups-of-coffee>
 - (Resources may be available at Annual Conference or the Orders & Fellowship Gathering, or your district office. Or, email called@greatplainsumc.org to inquire.) Set up a table with printed resources, stickers, Conference swag, and other information around vocation, Culture of Call, and “Raise the Question.” Invite your congregation to peruse the table after worship.
 - Invite your listeners to write down three ways that God might be calling them “for such a time as this.”
 - Depending on your setting, you might consider transitioning from your message into an interactive prayer response—for example, you could ask people to write down on a small piece of paper what *their* next step in discipleship will be. Then invite them bring that paper forward or place it in the offering plate as an act of commitment.

- Continue to extend the threefold invitation from this series: **Pray. Seek. Go.**
 - **Pray:** Invite your people to ask God to help them see, hear, or know what God's voice sounds like. Encourage them to use whatever words they might have for prayer. "God, will you help me to hear your voice?"
 - **Seek:** Pay attention to possibilities that open up or scripture that reveals what God might be saying to you. "I am paying attention to God's words for me by..."
 - **Go:** Reach out to a pastor, mentor, or trusted friend to consider what God may be calling you to do. "I think God might be..."