

Café on the Square

Christ the Redeemer Church
September 27, 2009
17th Sunday after Pentecost/Green Sunday

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22
Rev Gary L. Smith
www.christredeemerchurch.com

This book of Esther is not about religion. It is about real life. It is a short book in the Jewish scriptures...only 10 short chapters.

Esther was a Jewish girl who won the Miss Persia beauty pageant and later married the king of a country where the Jewish people were enslaved. The king's right-hand man felt the Jewish people were insulting him by not bowing down to him properly so he had decided to destroy the entire Jewish population.

Then Esther walked in to speak with the king -- uninvited. Out of nowhere. Gutsy. She had arranged for the Jewish people to pray and fast for three days, she put on her royal robes, and she went into the king's chambers to negotiate. She could have gone in to save only her life and allowed her family and nation to perish. Or she could risk it all and try to save her nation by asking king the call off the massacre.

She is convincing. The king decides to call off the massacre and instead to hang his right hand man who had devised the extermination plan. Esther saved a nation by her one courageous decision.

Life is full of critical decisions in life. Lisa Dennis is leading a five-week Girl's Study class for girls aged 7th-12th grades to read a book of stories about teenage girls facing decisions in life. This is a Safe Group for our older girls. Today these 10 girls are going with Lisa to eat, then to get their nails done, then to go over the first chapter of this book on Decision Making in life. Future class topics that Lisa will lead include Dealing with Parents, etiquette lessons, boys, spending money wisely, etc. I don't know what kind of home Esther was raised in but somewhere along the way she learned how to make Proper Decisions in life. She saved an entire nation of people with her skills and willingness to stand for right. Lisa is doing her part to help our young ladies to learn to make good decisions in life.

Our daughter Amity attended a similar weekly Safe Group at Frazer United Methodist in Montgomery, Alabama. Once I asked her what she talked about that night. She said, "You." Dealing with parents is tough some days. Lisa will help these girls get through teen years.

A man in our church invited me to have lunch this part Monday with him and a friend of his. It was a good and long lunch. The friend began the lunch with the words, "This lunch is long over due. I have wanted to thank you and your church for the past two years for your prayers for my wife two years ago. Your prayers worked. My cousin is a Cardinal in the Vatican and he says I need to stick close to you and your church because your prayers

for us worked.” His wife had cancer, their friend who is a member of our church asked us to pray, we did regularly, and the wife was healed.

This man thanking me received a heart transplant 16 years ago in Houston. He is Dr. DeBakey’s longest living heart transplant recipient. He had eggs and ham for lunch. Full plate. He smoked a nice smelling cigar after lunch. He came to say thanks to our church.

It is not about religion. It is about Life.

His life was saved 16 years ago. He lives a thankful life. His wife lives and teaches school. He lives a thankful life. He grew up half-Catholic and half-Jewish, he said. Said his parents wanted him to learn both teachings. When you have a new heart, Life becomes more precious and God becomes larger than our beliefs.

Three years ago we were in need of a pianist. Tommie Thornton suggested we run an ad in the paper. I did not think there was much point in that. What kind of piano player would look in the paper for a piano position?

Then I remembered that Pam once looked in the paper and stumbled upon an advertisement for a teaching position in Mississippi. An Episcopal school got a wonderful kindergarten teacher from that little advertisement.

We ran the ad and only got one response. But the responder was perfect. Just what God ordered and arranged for our new little church. Annette has played piano for our worship services and choir for three years.

She told me in the interview that she and her family would not get involved in the Church due to some past negative experiences with rigid Churches. I said that was fine. We just wanted her to play the piano for us. She said she only wanted a three-month trial period. We only wanted a trial period also. We never discussed the trial period after three months.

As Eric told me this past week in H.E.B grocery store, this church began to get under their skin. I was hoping he did not mean I got under his skin. I know I can be irritating at times. Eric meant it in a good way. Our lives got intertwined. All from a little newspaper ad.

H.E.B. grocery store and Café on the Square conversations this week. Real life stuff.

It has been a wonderful three years with Annette here. Today is her last Sunday as our regular pianist. She will return from time to time to play for us in a substitute role. God brought her and her personality in at just the right time. The right time in her life and the right time in the life of this Church. We give God thanks for Annette and her husband Eric and daughter Lea and son Luke.

“He told them to celebrate those days as days of joyful feasting and as a time for giving food to each other and presents to the poor.” The Jewish people celebrated their new lives by eating and giving presents to the poor.

Feasting and Generosity. That is a way to live a life of Thanksgiving and Gratitude. Eat and give, as one of our members summarizes it. .

God is never mentioned in the book of Esther. God’s ways are obvious and God’s fingerprints are all over the story. But the Name is never mentioned. A beauty queen asked her people to pray, she put on her best royal robe, stuck out her neck, took a risk, made a courageous decision, and saved her own people. Her life made a difference. Raw life. Raw story. Life is a risky and messy endeavor.

I should have smoked a cigar with the new friend. I passed on it since I figured I would start choking and have a heart attack there in the Café on the Square. That would have been embarrassing to have had a heart attack in front of a man with a transplanted heart who was smoking a cigar. Had I died from a heart attack then y’all would have to put an ad in the paper advertising for a new preacher. I just enjoyed the cigar smoke as I listened to the grateful man with the heart transplant.

Feasting on ham, eggs, and a cigar. A little ad in the paper. A beauty queen. And not a mention of God’s name in the book. Just a story of God’s ways and our human actions. Feast and be Generous. That is what we can do with our gratitude. Maybe even smoke a cigar. I hope my grandma forgives me for saying that from the pulpit. I know my grandpa will forgive me. He had me working in his tobacco fields with him when I was a little boy. Then I would sit by him in church each Sunday. Great memories. Memories of work and church and real life that are treasured to this day. Amen.