

“Be Authentic to the Way God Created You Unique”

Select phrases from Esther and Psalm 27; Mark 3:21-22 & Matthew 7:15-16a

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Prayer for Understanding Living Word, help us be present to your Spirit moving among us as we open ourselves to scripture that both comforts and challenges. Breathe your holy wisdom into human words; saturate us with the boldness to wrestle blessing from this book that some have falsely claimed holds nothing for us but condemnation. As we bring old baggage and our own fresh, unique insights, open our hearts and minds to your good news. Amen

God has named us beloved. We glorify God when we are authentic to the way God created us unique. We become fully alive when we trust that we belong and our distinct gender and orientation belong.

God creates all on a spectrum with great diversity. Ponder how the apparent dualisms in the Creation story, sea and land, night and day, animals and plants are all spectrums. God is infinitely more creative than mere binary elements. There is sea, shore, beach, marsh, swamp, estuary, lagoon, delta, lake, river, wetland, bog, mudflat, foreshore, riparian, land, etc. There is day, blue hour, dawn, eclipse, golden hour, dusk, twilight, moonlight, northern lights, starlight, night etc. There are plants, fungi, zoophyte, slime mold, euglena, green sea slugs, coral, sponges, protists, animals etc. Genesis uses polarities to convey that God creates multitudes of nuances in between and beyond every contrast. Therefore, when Genesis declares God creates male and female it means that God creates a vast array of genders and orientations. LGBTQIA2S+ persons reveal the goodness in the expansive in-betweens and beyond. I know of nothing that God creates that is binary. In contrast, humanity often tries to categorize, distort, and reduce to dualism.

Select phrases from the story of Esther: **Esther 3:1-11, 4:1-17, 5:1-3, 8-13, 7:3-4, 8:11, 10:3 “King Xerxes promoted Haman over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. All the king’s officials would bow down before Haman. But Mordecai refused to bow down. When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down, Haman was filled with rage. Haman had learned of Mordecai’s nationality, so he decided it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he looked for a way to destroy all the people like Mordecai throughout the entire empire. Then Haman approached King Xerxes and said, “There is a certain people scattered through all the provinces of your empire who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their laws are different from those of any other people, and they refuse to obey the laws of the king. So it is not in the king’s interest to let them live. If it please the king, issue a decree that they be destroyed, and I will give 375 tons of silver to be deposited in the royal treasury.” The king agreed. “The money and the people are both yours to do with as you see fit.” When Queen Esther’s maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. Esther sent for Hathach (ha thaK), one of the king’s eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. Mordecai told Hathach the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the death of the people. Mordecai asked Hathach to direct Esther to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: “Anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days.” Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: “Do not think for a moment that because you are in the palace you will escape when all others are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?” Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go and gather together all the people and fast for me. I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.” Haman gathered together his friends and boasted about his great wealth. Haman bragged about the honors the king had given him and how he had been promoted over all the other nobles and officials. Then Haman added, “But this is all worth nothing as long as I see Mordecai sitting at the palace gate.” Esther approached the king. When the king saw Esther he welcomed her and held out the gold scepter. Then the king asked Esther, “What do you want?” Queen Esther replied, “I ask that my life and the lives of my people will be spared. For my people and I have been sold to those who would kill, slaughter, and annihilate us.” The King made a**

decree to give Esther and her people authority to unite to defend their lives. Mordecai became the prime minister, he continued to work for the good of his people and to speak up for the welfare of all their descendants.”

Many times, the majority picks a minority to blame for the world’s problems. Too often people who have the means to live apart from people who live differently, refuse to get to know them and promote fear, hate, and exclusion. Tragically, religion is often manipulated to rationalize oppression. Greed magnifies oppression. Sometimes those in power create policies with almost no knowledge of the people who will be harmed.

Usually, people who resist assimilation provide healthy diversity. Often, those who blur binary labels enhance collective well-being.

How can we honor Esther’s courage to advocate for the oppressed? What resources do you have that are to be used for “just a time as this” to help others? Esther seeks her people’s support as she prepares to risk everything. Esther and her

People enact mutual solidarity. Similarly, how can we act to expand love for all people? Esther had resolve to advocate for herself, and the oppressed, as she was restrained by Persian patriarchy. How can you be inspired by Esther’s tenacity to change politics? Eunuchs, who occupied a liminal space of gender, were essential to the liberation of everyone. How do LGBTQIA2S+ persons help everyone understand how to live as a unique child of God?

While Esther brings a challenge to act courageously, Psalm 27 offers comfort when such action leads to loss. When others oppress us and scrutinize our every move, we can be certain God loves us. Does God hiding the psalmist safe in a “secret sanctuary” remind us of the concept of the closet? How can we make the world outside the closet safer and more welcoming so that all are free to exit that secret space when they are ready to do so? The psalmist sings these select phrases: **Psalm 27: Select Phrases “When evil people come to devour me, when foes attack me, I will remain confident. God will hide me in God’s secret sanctuary. Then I will hold my head high. Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close. My enemies are waiting for me with every breath they threaten me with violence. Yet I am confident I will see the Lord’s goodness while I am here in the land of the living. Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous.”**

In the good news of Mark, Jesus is healing, making whole, and welcoming everyone into community. Jesus’ family, and most religious leaders, reject Jesus’ redeeming grace freely offered to all people. Mark states: **Mark 3:21-22 “When Jesus’ family heard what was happening, they tried to take Jesus away. “Jesus is out of his mind,” they said. The teachers of religious law said, “Jesus is possessed by Satan.”** This scripture offers comfort to those being oppressed, for Jesus was treated similarly. Jesus was crucified. Jesus is resurrected. Jesus is creating a realm where all people can authentic celebrate their God created uniqueness. This scripture offers challenge to anyone who oppresses whether in outright actions or lack of action with complicit silence. Many reject universal, unconditional love by clutching control, tradition or fear.

Rachel Held Evans said: “If same-sex relationships are really sinful, then why do they so often produce good fruit, loving families, open homes, self-sacrifice, commitment, faithfulness and joy? And [why does an un-affirming] response often produce bad fruit, shame, loneliness, broken families and fear?” Jesus said: **Matthew 7:15-16a Select Phrases “Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit.”**

The art on your bulletin cover was created by Pastor Lauren Wright Pittman. Lauren wrote: “As I created this piece, I thought about a prism. I remember the first time I used this seemingly magical, transparent stone. I held it to the light, which I could not see, and to my surprise the light was broken down into the vibrant colors of a rainbow.

It was natural for me to think the stone was creating something that was not there, but this medium revealed the complex truth that light is in fact made up of all the colors in existence. In my image, Jesus is a prism. The light that is life that comes from the Creator shines through Jesus, and it is through Jesus that we can see the fullness and beauty of who God is. It is through Jesus that all of Creation came into being. I realized there are seven colors in a simplified rainbow and there are also seven days of Creation. Each of the days of Creation is referenced through simplified patterning in each of the colors. It is through Christ that we experience the abounding saturation of God, who chose to dwell among us. Like

light through a prism, the glory of God refracts through the multifaceted life of each and every human being, creating a picture of the divine that is as varied and beautiful as there are colors in existence. In this image, the rainbow also echoes the full spectrum of humanity and celebrates the image of God that is present in every human and in every facet of Creation.”

In the beginning, when God breathed the breath of life in us, God blessed us and called us very good. We celebrate the fact that we are created in the image of God by being unapologetically ourselves and becoming the person God called us to be: authentic, whole, complex and made to love, even when others say, “they have gone out of their mind”. Worship is an act of celebration and protest, remembrance and enactments of a world where all belong. We practice these acts in a world where the safety and rights of LGBTQIA2S+ people are threatened each day. On this National Coming Out Day consider crying out for freedom and rejoice in the goodness of our embodied selves. We remember the suffering of those who came before us and imagine new ways of loving ourselves and our neighbors. May the love that binds us together as one family, chosen by God, continue to inspire us to extend grace, compassion, and understanding to all. May the courage of Esther, who risked her life to advocate for freedom, embolden us to use our privileges to uplift those whose belovedness is being threatened. May our particular gifts, personalities and identities shine brightly reflecting the image of God in us and the belovedness in which we have been shaped. May the assurance of God's unwavering presence accompany us on our journey, reminding us that we are never alone, and that we are deeply loved and cherished just as we are. May we feel the delight of the peace of God, the love of Christ, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Amen

