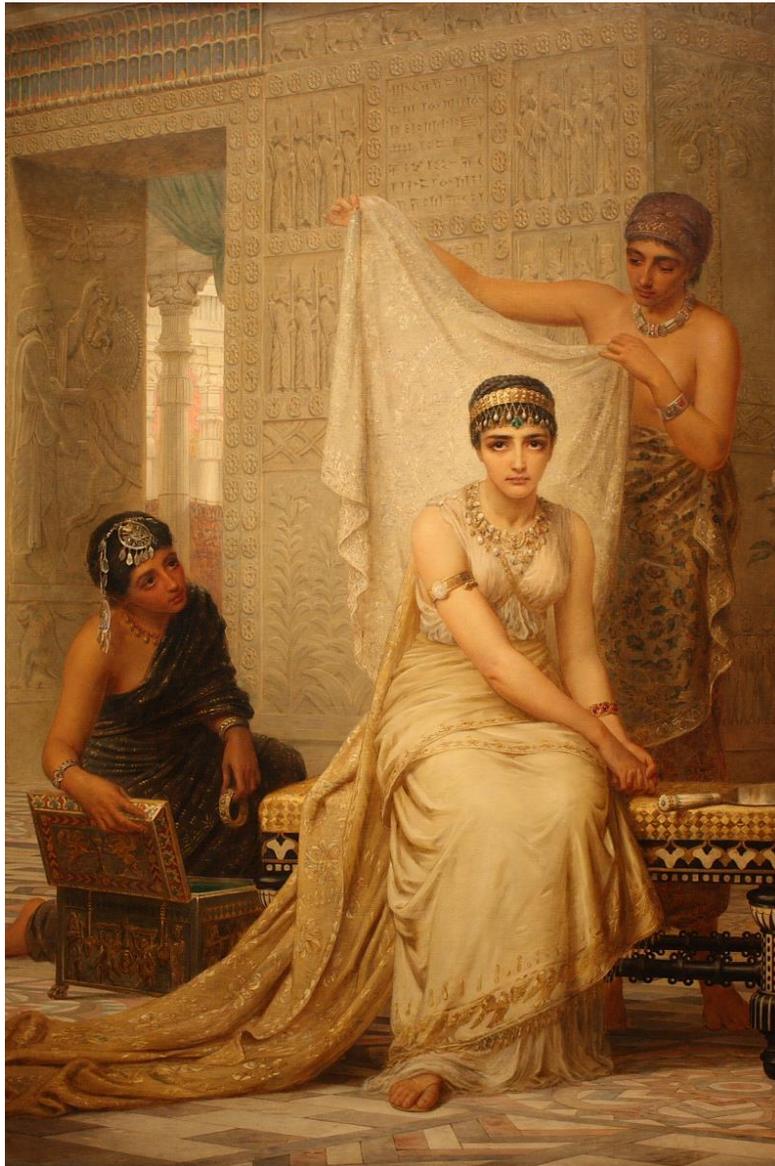


**ESTHER**  
“a coming out story for Lent”



The Book of Esther is a story of how Queen Esther, the Jewish wife of the Persian King Ahasuerus, implores the monarch to retract an edict that orders the annihilation of all the exiled Jews in the empire.

While the entire Book of Esther makes for fascinating reading, the essence of the story of Esther, especially for the LGBT community, is how fear and unease can easily force a person into a “closet.”

As the drama unfolds, and the divine plan is introduced, Esther must “come out” for God’s plan of salvation to be fulfilled. She is only able to do so after a period of fasting and prayer.

The story is summarized and excerpted below.

## **SCRIPTURE: The Book of Esther**

In chapter three of the book, King Ahasuerus' chief adviser, Haman ben Hammedatha, convinces the monarch to destroy all the Jews in the empire because they are different.

### **Esther 3: 8-11**

**8** *Haman then sought an audience with Ahasuerus. He said, "These are a people who remain unassimilated into our ways, and they are scattered throughout the empire in all the provinces. Their laws are not like those of the other peoples and they disregard the imperial decrees. It is not in your interest, therefore, to tolerate them. 9 If you order their destruction, I am willing to give 375 tons of silver to the royal tax collectors to fill the royal treasury."*

**10** *Ahasuerus removed his signet ring and handed it over to Haman ben Hammedatha, the Agagite, oppressor of the Jewish people. 11 "Keep your money!" Ahasuerus said, "You can do with those people any way you want."*

Queen Esther is unaware of the plot against the Jews until her Jewish adviser, Mordecai, urges her to beg the king for mercy for the Jewish people. This mission frightens her because Esther has never revealed her Jewish identity to the king. Through an attendant, Esther tells Mordecai of her inability to help. He responds that her silence will not protect her:

### **Esther 4: 13-16**

**13** *"Don't fool yourself into thinking that, just because you are in the imperial palace, you will be the only Jewish person to escape. 14 If you insist on remaining silent at this time, vindication and liberation will come to our people through another source, but both you and your family will surely die." Who's to say? - you may have come into the royal court for just such a time as this."*

**15** *So Esther sent a message to Mordecai: 16 "Bring together all the Jewish people in Susa now and fast for me. Do not eat or drink, day and night, for three days. After that, I will go to the king in defiance of the law. If I die, I die."*

Esther seeks strength in the Most High as she stares death in the face. She takes off her royal garments and puts on robes of mourning. Instead of expensive oils, she covers her head with ashes. On the third day, though, she emerges from her ashes, and bedecked in finest grandeur, she approaches the king.

### **Esther 15: 5-12**

**5** *Her face shone with perfect beauty and she looked happy, as if she had just fallen in love. But in her heart, she was frozen with fear. 6 When she had gone through the doors she stood face to face with Ahasuerus, who was seated on the throne and dressed in full imperial array with gold and precious jewels. He was a terrifying sight to behold.*

*7 Lifting a stern face, he looked at Esther in fierce anger. She faltered, turned pale and almost fainted, and had to lean her hand on her attendant's shoulder.*

*8 But God intervened, and Ahasuerus' heart grew soft. He rose from the throne and took her in his arms until she was once again able to stand. He soothed her with words of comfort, saying, 9 "What is it Esther? I am your husband; you need not fear me. 10 Our law applies only to ordinary people. You will not die. Come here to me."*

*11 He lifted his golden scepter and touched her on the neck. 12 Then he kissed her, saying, "Tell me what you want."*

Fear prevents Esther from immediately confiding in the king but over the course of two banquets, she reveals not only her true identity but also Haman's plot to destroy her people. Furious, the king retracts the genocide edict against the Jews and executes Haman.

## FOR REFLECTION

1. In the Book of Esther, "coming out" is not just about saving oneself but also about saving others. By placing her own face on the nameless mass of the despised, Esther moves the king from enmity to sympathy, and he removes the Israelites' genocide sentence. In your life, how have you placed a face on the LGBTQ community to others in your family, neighborhood, parish, workplace, and world? Do you feel "coming out" stories have the power to change social systems, confront, or even dispel threats of LGBTQ "annihilation?"
2. At first, Esther hesitates to reveal her identity to the king, thinking her secrecy will protect her. What role has hiding your identity as an LGBTQ person or ally played in your life?
3. In the letter to the Romans, Saint Paul writes, "*We know that God makes everything work together for the good of those who love God and have been called according to God's purpose*" (8:28). Queen Esther is willing to risk her life to save her people. As an LGBTQ person or ally have you ever broken a rule, law, or cultural standard in order to do the "right" thing? If so, what happened?
4. One distinguishing characteristic of the Book of Esther is that it is the only biblical book that does not mention God by name. Yet God's fingerprints are all over it. As an LGBTQ person or ally, how do you view God's activity in your life? Is God dynamic in orchestrating your events and relationships, or do you see God more as intervening in the background?
5. "*Who's to say? - you may have come into the royal court for just such a time as this*" (Esther 4:14). Have there been one *or more* times where God has worked through you and your LGBTQ identity? Are you able to see God's plan for you through your "coming-out?" Do you believe that God has put you into your particular place and moment in history for a particular purpose?
6. Esther fasts for three days before confronting the king. She also asks that the entire Jewish people join her in fasting. Does a "fasting" of any kind clarify for you your God given purpose?
7. Every chapter in the Book of Esther has at least one "eunuch" - a biblical term for gender non-conformists. Throughout scripture, eunuchs are documented as figures of social power, challenging the exclusion of marginalized people from political and religious communities. Given biblical history and the naming of eunuchs in scripture why do you

think there is such resistance to accepting gender non-conformists in our churches and world today? What do you feel ignites the rage of some to provoke violence and discrimination towards the LGBTQ community?

## PRAYER

Speak to us this day, O God,  
and humble us to hear your word.  
Make us still enough to notice your presence,  
Quiet enough to hear your voice,  
Brave enough to speak your good news,  
and wise enough to follow your spirit.

So often we pray to you for life:  
to preserve life, to prolong life,  
to guard life, to begin life.  
Today we pray something else.  
We pray for courage to lose our life for your sake,  
and we pray for the wisdom to find it.

As Mordecai challenged Esther to be faithful at all costs,  
make us hear the voices of people oppressed,  
whose stories challenge our way of life.

We pray for your children everywhere:

For your people who are suffering,  
Discriminated against because of their race, gender identity, sexuality, or religion.  
For your people who are fearful,  
Faced with losing their access to healthcare or treatment.  
For your people who are isolated,  
Living in the shackles of addiction or abuse.

Holy comforter, challenger, redeemer, we know that you are in our midst.  
Help us recognize your spirit on the move, and empower us to join your work.

Help us be your church, reformed and still being reformed.  
Help us be your people, formed and still being formed.  
Help us boldly share the news of your love, for such a time as this  
Amen.

- [Rev. Anna George Traynham](#)

