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Years ago, I was helping lead a youth group, and as we were planning for the studies and activities that the youth wanted to do for the coming year, one of the teenage girls said, “I want us to read the book of Esther. It’s my favorite story in the Bible.” Some of the other youth had a blank expression on their faces, and some were probably afraid to admit that they didn’t know much about the story of this remarkable woman. After a brief period of silence, I asked, “What is it you like about this story?” and the girl replied, “There are very few stories about women in the Bible. Esther is an amazing story of a woman who’s a superhero, and I think we should all know about her.” Needless to say, that year we had a Bible study on Esther.

Many women over the past three decades of my ministry have made similar comments each time I’ve offered a Bible study or had a sermon on the book of Esther. Even though God or religion is never mentioned in the Book of Esther, the story offers hope and an example of courage. Esther serves as a positive role model, inspiring women to stand up

for what they know is right. As one woman remarked, “If she could do it, so can I.”

The story begins with another hero, Vashti, though we seldom remember much about her. She was the Queen of Persia who refused to show off her beauty to her drunken husband, who was the king, and all his party-going buddies. She stood up for herself, being the first woman of the Me-Too movement thousands of years beforehand. Unfortunately, her bravery prompted the king to seek a new wife, and he held a contest to find his next bride.

Esther was an unlikely candidate, for she was a descendent of captives, a Jewish immigrant of very low status. Her beauty, however, captured the king’s eyes, and after a period of time, she became the next queen.

During Esther’s time as queen, her cousin Mordeci learned of a plot to destroy all their people. Haman, one of the king’s officials, decided to kill all the Jews since Mordeci wouldn’t bow down before him. Esther decided she couldn’t sit back and let

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her people be destroyed, even though the king didn't know about her own Jewish identity. She came up with a plan and approached the king, even though she knew that anyone who came to the king without permission could be killed. She knew that she was called at such a time as this to save her people, in spite of the risk to herself.

The story prompts us to wonder: When have you encountered an unjust situation and tried to discern how to respond? When have you tried to discern how to help someone even at the risk of your own safety?

Disciples Karon Alexander recalls a time from her middle school years when she confronted a situation and didn't know how to respond. She wrote:

Years ago, while walking to my predominately white middle school, I witnessed something that has been preserved in my memory for decades. Several yards ahead of me was Josette; a girl I barely knew. Although her skin color was the same as the majority of the students, her appearance was drastically different from other female classmates. She wore long dark skirts,

sweaters ... and often kept a scarf tied around her head... As we approached the schoolyard, I could hear a few boys yelling at her. As I got closer, I heard these words: "Go back to where you came from you nasty Jew!", "You're ugly!", "Nobody wants you here!" There were other unkind statements. Even though I didn't know what a Jew was, I knew that their actions were wrong. I looked ahead, pretending to not hear or see anything, and went straight to my class.<sup>1</sup>

In our younger years, we might not know how to respond, but as we age, we become more aware of the injustices around us, and through the Reconciliation offering that we take at this time every year, we help provide funds for local congregations who want to make a difference in the world, for those who create ways of confronting the racism that exists in our communities.

I know that some would rather not talk about racism, or they don't think it's real, and I've had people in congregations tell me not to talk about it in church. I've listened to friends and colleagues tell me painful stories about their encounters with racism, but some in churches today would rather

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not listen. Others feel powerless to make any difference.

That's why the story of Esther is so important for us to hear today, for in the portion of the story read this morning, we heard how she invited to dinner her husband, the king, and Haman, the one who was plotting to destroy her people. During the meal she exclaimed, "My people and I will be destroyed. Save the lives of my people!"

I imagine Haman choking on a bit of food as the queen reveals this plot. As the king asks who had planned this evil, the queen looks across the table at Haman, who tries to get away until the king calls for his guards to capture him.

Throughout history, even U.S. history, [Esther] has inspired countless, especially those seeking freedom. Consider the case of Sojourner Truth, whose very name underscores one of the lessons we glean from Esther. Sojourner Truth was an American abolitionist and women's rights activist. Truth was born into slavery in Swartekill, N.Y., but escaped with her

infant daughter to freedom in 1826. After going to court to recover her son in 1828, she became the first black woman to win such a case against a white man (Wikipedia).

At a Women's Rights Convention in New York City in 1853, Sojourner Truth was one of the speakers. Although she was illiterate, she knew her Bible stories. She told the conferees: "Queen Esther came forth, for she was oppressed, and felt there was a great wrong and she said I will die or I will bring my complaint before the king."<sup>2</sup>

Sojourner Truth knew that if Esther could face the evils of injustice, then she could too. The lives of both these women still speak to us today, encouraging us to listen to those who face racial struggles and to find ways of working together to create a better world for all of us. It's not an easy job, but if they could do it, we can too.

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<sup>1</sup> Reconciliation offering insert,  
<https://cdn.reconciliationministry.org/wp->

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<sup>2</sup> [www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/93041325](http://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/93041325)