

Worship guide

Scripture texts

Esther 4:13-14
Luke 19:5-10
Psalms 146:3-10

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Introduction

One place we find inspiration for following a challenging call from God in contentious times is the book of Esther. Her husband, the king, had been convinced that Esther and all the Jewish people were barbaric and untrustworthy, that they were bringing crime to the land and destroying others' way of life. Mordecai, Esther's adopted father, asked her to change her husband's mind. She was afraid because the king was known to be an egotistical, fickle and violent man. But Mordecai implored her not to be silent and to take action: "You may have come into your position for such a time as this," he said. Esther prayed and fasted, gathered her courage, and took action to ensure that the Jewish people were allowed the same rights as everyone in her husband's empire.

Who in our communities are being treated as the Jewish people in Esther's time? How can we be church together in a way that ensures we each have an equal voice and equal rights? How can our churches be places of refuge from the world that divides us and sees some among us as enemies of the state, enemies of morality, enemies of its own citizens? Let's explore together our options for taking concrete action. Perhaps it's time to institute that weekly dinner supported by donations and free to any in the community that we've been talking about. Maybe it's time to look into becoming a sanctuary congregation, to send a member or two on a delegation with CPT, to host an event with CPT or Mennonite Mission Network.

Let us pray together. Let us worship together. Let us discern together how to respond to Christ's calling at such a time as this.

Children's time

Adapted from eyesonbullying.org

While planning, think about your childhood experiences. Can you remember times when you were repeatedly teased, humiliated, or shut out of a group? When you were forced to do something you didn't want to do by someone

you considered more powerful than you? When YOU intentionally hurt someone who was vulnerable, or witnessed this happening to someone else? If you are like most people, you remember, and these memories can last a lifetime.

Story swap

This activity will:

- Let children know that bullying affects everyone, and that they are not alone.
 - Help children understand that bullying is not acceptable.
 - Establish the groundwork for future conversations about bullying.
1. Share your story with the children in your care, and explain how it made you feel then and now.
 2. Ask them how it felt to hear the story. How did they feel about the person bullying, the person being bullied, and the witness/es (if any)?
 3. Ask children to share their own bullying story. (When in a group, have children substitute fictional names for real ones.) Acknowledge that children might feel embarrassed or afraid to recount their experience in front of others.
 4. Brainstorm suggestions for things children can do to stop or prevent bullying, using the stories they told as examples. What are things they could say/do if they see bullying? Examples:
 - “Stop that!” (to bully)
 - “Are you OK? Do you want to come play with me?” (to victim)
 - Tell a trusted adult.

Sermon starters

Homilies that reflect on discerning calling would be appropriate—the stories of Esther and Zaccheus, one called as a Jewish woman being targeted by those in power, and one called as an enforcer of power targeting the people. What do we hear Jesus calling us to do in a time such as this, with division and mistrust in our communities?

Worship resources

Songs from *Voices Together*:

There are many songs and readings that fit these worship materials. You will have your own ideas, but here are some we found.

Gathering

- No. 554 “I Bind My Heart This Tide”
- No. 705 “For the Healing of the Nations”

Worship song

- No. 57 “Holy Spirit Come With Power”

Response song

- No. 685 “O Lord, Hear My Prayer”

Benediction

- No. 390 “In Christ There is no East or West”

Scripture reading

Psalms 146:3-10

Leader: Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

Together: When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

Leader: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;

Together: who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the unseeing.

Leader: The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

Together: The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Leader: The Lord will reign forever; Your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Together: Praise the Lord!

Confession/words of assurance

Leader: In our church, we gather in community. In our nation, we are divided into groups: right and wrong, Republican and Democrat, entitled citizens and undocumented people. To be church in this nation divided is to take the risk of opening our doors as a place of refuge for those targeted for violence and humiliation, those considered deserving of less, and those made invisible in our nation. We must follow the example of Esther in her boldness as she made demands of the king to grant life, rights and privileges to her people. We must follow the example of Jesus of Nazareth as he stood with the most marginalized.

ALL: In confession, God, we are learning we cannot be silent nor close ourselves off to those in need. You have, indeed, shown us what you call us to do. May we be willing to open our churches to be a courageous community.

Litany of Resistance, CPT

Leader: We do not put our trust in the rulers of this world, following instead the example of Jesus Christ. Perhaps we were born into this community.

ALL: For such a time as this.

Leader: Let God's will be done.

ALL: Not ours.

Leader: With the help of God's grace,

ALL: Let us resist evil everywhere we find it.

Leader: With the forces of fear,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With the politics of violence,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With laws that betray human rights,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With the bombing of civilians,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With the expulsion of our undocumented brothers and sisters,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With the ravaging of our earth,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With the raping and abusing of women, of men, and of children,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With governments that deny health care to the least of us,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With an economy that impoverishes and dehumanizes,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With the manipulation and control of public information,

ALL: We will not comply;

Leader: With deception and lies,

ALL: We will not comply.

ALL: This we commit to you, O Lord, who has called us to community, to stand up for and with our people, to make amends for our mistakes. May we build a refuge place together in your name.

Leader: With the help of God's grace,

ALL: We will struggle for justice.

Leader: With the compassion of Christ,

ALL: We will stand for what is true.

Leader: With God's abiding kindness,

ALL: We will love even our enemies.

Leader: With the love of Christ,

ALL: We will resist all evil.

Leader: With God's unending faithfulness,

ALL: We will work to build the beloved community.

Leader: With Christ's passionate love,

ALL: We will carry the cross.

Leader: With God's overwhelming goodness

ALL: We will walk as pilgrims of peace.

Leader: With Christ's fervent conviction,

ALL: We will labor for truth.

Leader: With God's infinite mercy,

ALL: We will live in solidarity with all people.

Leader: In the end there are three things that last:

ALL: Faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.

Leader: Let us abide in God's love.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Prayer

Adapted from Diann Neu's "Prayer for Healing"

God of all,

Help us keep our eyes on the goal. Give us courage to address the issues that have been left to fester, And humility to model love and compassion. In a polarized community in desperate need of healing, Bring people of all beliefs together, That we may work for peace and justice for all.

Response: In your mercy, grant us healing.

Holy Spirit,

Guide us to trust in you. Soften our hearts to hear the cries of those in pain. Strengthen us to be the church needed in such a time as this. Embolden us to be a refuge for those seeking peace. Help us find our path, That we may travel well together, though the journey be long.

Response: In your mercy, grant us healing.

Son of God,

Call out to us to follow you. Wake us to resist the way of division and hate. Lead us instead in your way of truth and life. You who healed the sick, fed the hungry, clothed the naked. Help us to see those around us in need. Let us sing out your justice and love across the land.

Response: In your mercy, grant us healing. Amen.

Benediction

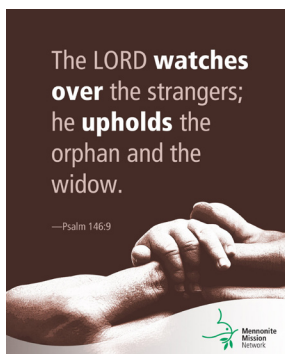
And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him. — Colossians 3:3:15-17

Downloadable scripture graphics

MennoniteMission.net/ScriptureGraphics



[Psalm 146:5-7](#)



[Psalm 146:9](#)



[Psalm 146:9](#)

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