

Hello God

Though you're a million miles away  
do you listen when I pray  
can you hear me.

Just a nod  
I don't need no holy sign  
like turning water into wine  
just to please me.  
Cause I know I'm just a tiny speck  
in your great big universe  
and I'm not the kind of guy  
who quotes your word chapter and verse  
but I sure could stand to hear from you tonight

Hello God  
I'm over here  
all my faith  
is lost in fear  
I'll need your grace  
to help me journey on  
cause I never felt so small  
Hello God. Hear my call!<sup>1</sup>

If you've ever sung that song, prayed that prayer, stared up at the ceiling and asked, “Hello God. Can you hear me now?” Then the story of Esther is for you. Through a curious series of unexpected events, this orphaned Jewish girl rises from obscurity to become Queen of the Persian Empire. She has it all, and she risks it all to save the Jewish people from destruction. Through the courage of a queen, Israel's sorrow turns to gladness. Through exploring her story this morning, I hope to encourage us in these risky times with the hope that our sorrow will be turned to gladness.

### The Courage of a Queen

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One writer this week called the book of Esther an enigma. God doesn't speak in Esther. God is silent. And the people of God need to hear a word!

They need to hear a word, because a word has been decreed against them. The king agrees with Haman's request to destroy all the Jews in the Persian Empire. How could they be saved from such “*a foe and an enemy*” as Haman?

The power of petty people is on display in Esther. The king is a fool. Throw a party, serve some wine, offer a bribe, he'll say whatever you want him to say. His talk is cheap, but it imposes quite

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis DeYoung, “Hello God.” From: <http://www.elyrics.net/read/d/dennis-deyoung-lyrics/hello-god-lyrics.html>

a price. Haman is a classic example of Proverbs 16:18 (NRSV) *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*. Through his clever political maneuvering, he has made it to the top. He is the king’s chief vizier; his right hand man. He has it all, but as he’s heading home one day, he sees Mordecai; and Mordecai won’t bow to him; Mordecai won’t show him respect, and Haman burns with rage. He won’t just teach Mordecai respect, he’ll destroy him, and his family, and his people!

Haman whispers in the king’s ear. A bag or two of coins changes hands, and the word is spoken. The Jews will be annihilated. Esther 3:13 (NRSV) *Letters were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces, giving orders to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.*

Israel mourned. Mordecai mourned, but there’s more to the story, another word to be said; a word that the king doesn’t know; a word that Haman doesn’t know. That word is a name: *Hadassah*, which in Greek is – Esther! Mordecai is Esther’s uncle. Esther is a Jew; thus, the Queen has been sentenced to death.

If, that is, she speaks up, if she says this other word. She doesn’t have to. She can keep quiet, keep her position, and keep her very good life. It’s good to be the Queen! Why risk it all when there’s so much to be gained by playing it safe?

Esther could use a word right about now! “Hello God. I’m over here.” But God is silent. God does not speak, at least not directly.

Mordecai does speak, one of the great passages of Scripture that ranks right up there with Romans 8:28, Esther 4:14 (NRSV) *For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.*”

Esther hears that word. She risks everything in the hope that she is the king’s queen “*for just such a time as this.*” She breaks protocol by entering the king’s presence uninvited; he shows her favor; she invites him to a party. Two can play this game. Israel will be saved thanks to the courage of a queen.

What are the risks you face this morning? Is there a word to be said; a word that may make a difference in a relationship or in someone’s life, perhaps in your life? Is there an opportunity before you, or perhaps just the glimmer of a possibility of an opportunity before you? Is the life you are living less than the life you long for? Do you long to be saved? Could you use a word?

“Hello God. I’m over here.” “*Who knows? Perhaps you have come to [this place, right where you are, right here, right now, this place] for just such a time as this.*”

Keep your head up. Face your fear with hope in your heart. You can be saved. God may be silent, but God is not absent. God is with you. God is at work oftentimes through the curious series of unfortunate events we call life. Keep your head up. Face your fear with the courage of a queen.

## ② From Sorrow to Gladness

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It takes faith to have the courage of a queen. It takes faith, Hebrews 11:1 (NRSV) *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Being a Christian is sometimes thought to be a way to escape from the challenges of life; and in fairness, sometimes it's practiced that way. Sometimes we look for the easy answer, the quick quip that solves all our problems and eases all our struggles. Sometimes we forget that faith is trust, not certainty; faith is making a commitment, taking a risk, when the outcome is still in doubt. Thus, faith isn't the absence of doubt; faith is the choice to “trust and obey” in the midst of doubt.

The Scots Confession was written in 1560, in the tumultuous times when religion and politics mixed to create a lethal brew; kingdoms toppled; kings and queens and thousands of mere mortals died; and John Knox confessed the faith in those uncertain, doubtful times:

“We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust. Who is eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible; one in substance and yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. By whom we confess and believe all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible to have been created, to be retained in their being, and to be ruled and guided by his inscrutable providence for such end as his eternal wisdom, goodness, and justice have appointed, and to the manifestation of his own glory.”<sup>2</sup>

Knox confessed his faith, our faith, that God's “inscrutable providence” was the guiding force in our lives and in history; that God was at work even though God is “incomprehensible [and] invisible.” Knox trusted that God is greater than our ability to understand. He trusted that God's silence does not equal God's absence.

This is the faith we Presbyterians profess. This is how we are Christian.

Knox's faith, Christian faith, the courage of a queen, turns our sorrow into gladness. Faith remembers that the final word has been spoken. It hears that word that answers every word spoken by foolish politicians, every word cursed by the Haman's and Hitler's of history, every word that takes the name of God in vain.

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<sup>2</sup> “The Scots Confession”. Chapter One. 1560. John Knox.

We answer all those words with the battle-cry of the Psalms: Psalm 124:8 (NRSV) *Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.* We face the gallows every latter-day Haman dares to build for us, every cross we are asked to bear; we face them with faith that God’s final word has been spoken; that word is a name; that word is Jesus, our Lord, our Savior. He is the One Who turns our sorrow into gladness.

Is Jesus the easy answer; the cheap out from life’s challenges? Is this simply another way to escape from the pain?

No, it’s a call to faith; faith in Jesus; faith that life is more than a series of unfortunate events; life is the realm of God’s “inscrutable providence.” Therefore, by faith, we face life’s challenges with the courage of a queen. Our goal is not to escape the pain; our goal is to engage the problem and embrace the possibility that there is a better way; that our sorrow can be turned to gladness. God may be silent, but God is not absent. God is with us. God is at work, and God has work for us to do. God has brought us to this place, right here, right now, for such a time as this.

Keep your head up. Face your fear with hope in your heart. God’s final word has been spoken. Put your trust in Jesus and get to work. Face your fear with the courage of a queen, and God will transform our sorrow into gladness. Amen.