Introduction:

So we switched things up a bit for this morning. Luke was scheduled to preach our first Advent sermon on the theme of hope. But given the time Luke and Becca have spent in the hospital this week we decided to switch so I'll be preaching this morning the sermon I had prepared for next Sunday, about peace.

Our Advent theme for this year comes from the Leader magazine and follows the Narrative Lectionary passages. The theme is "God's Dream" and focuses each week on another aspect of God's dream for us and our world around the traditional advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

The Worship Resource Team that organized this series introduces the idea by inviting us to "**activate our imaginations and to dream with God**." (p. 36). They say, "**Whether we are awake or sleeping, dreams are about *imagining and participating in alternative realities*. In this season of waiting for Jesus' birth and celebrating the ongoing presence of God-with-us, our congregations are invited to *dream with God: to prayerfully imagine the world as God desires it to be, and to act in ways that make God's dream reality*."** (p. 36). We are being invited to imagine the world as God desires it to be and then live in light of this.

Now, the passage I focus on today may seem strange for Advent as we're going to look at Esther chapter 4, not a passage we'd usually read during Advent. But the story of Esther and Mordecai can inspire good questions when it comes to imagining the peace God desires, that the Christ came to bring, and pondering our role in living into this dream. So we'll start in Esther and find our way to Advent.

Esther

The setting for the book of Esther is during the time when the people of Judah were under the rule of the Persian Empire and King Xerxes and many Jewish people were residing outside of the land of Judah. As the story goes, King Xerxes is throwing a lavish feast and at some point, he calls for his wife, Queen Vashti, to come before him because, we're told, "**she was gorgeous, and he wanted to show off her beauty both to the general public and to his important guests**." (1.11). Xerxes wants to show her off…but Vashti refuses to come which upsets the King. And the King and his council decide that Queen Vashti's actions in honoring her own autonomy might upset the patriarchal system if other wives hear about this so they decide Vashti needs to be punished and she is removed as Queen.

This opens the door for a new Queen to be named so a 'pageant' of sorts is held in order to find a new queen for Xerxes. And it is here that we are introduced to Esther. Esther's parents had died and she had been raised by her cousin, Mordecai. She is among the women chosen to take part in this competition and in the end is chosen as the new queen. We're told, "**the king loved Esther more than all the other women; she had won his love and his favor more than all the others. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her ruler in place of Vashti**." (2.17).

From here we're introduced to Haman, a man who is promoted by King Xerxes and given a position of honor. And we're not told why but Esther's cousin, Mordecai refuses to honor Haman. This angers Haman who discovers Mordecai is Jewish and decides he wants to kill not just Mordecai but all the Jewish people. So Haman goes to King Xerxes and convinces the King to let him do this, so Haman publicizes this plan and a date is chosen for when this genocide will happen.

And that brings us to our specific passage today in chapter 4. We heard it read already but Mordecai asks Esther to go before the king and intercede for her people. Esther is hesitant at first, knowing the law that says, **"Any man or woman who comes to the king in the inner courtyard without being called is to be put to death. Only the person to whom the king holds out the gold scepter may live**." (4.11). She knows going before the king uninvited is risking her life. But Mordecai responds by reminding Esther that her fate is tied to the fate of her people and says, "**if you don't speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family."** (4.14). Mordecai challenges Esther here.

An interesting detail about the book of Esther is that it contains no references to God. Odd for a scriptural book. And yet, as the authors of the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible notes say, **"God seems to lurk everywhere in the background of this book**." (p. 801). There is no explicit mention of God, yet we can see the workings of God in the background. I think this challenge from Mordecai to Esther is one of those times.

In any case, Esther meets this challenge, calls on her community to fast and pray for her as a means of support, and decides she will go before the king "**and if I am to die, then die I will**." (4.16).

As the story goes, the King offers Esther the golden scepter, sparing her life. Esther eventually reveals her Jewish identity and asks the King to reverse Haman's order, which he does. Now, I won't get too much into the rest of the story but suffice to say, it is *far* from peaceful. Haman is humiliated and killed and his plan to have the Jewish people killed is reversed and a new order is proclaimed that, as 8:11 puts it: "**allowed Jews in each town to join together and defend their lives. The Jews were free to wipe out, kill, and destroy every army of any people and province that attacked them**." (8.11).

Now, it would be easier to make the connection between this story and God's Dream of Peace if we stopped after chapter 4 and ignored the rest. It becomes more difficult when we take the whole violent story into account. Nevertheless, there are some things we can glean from this story.

I think one of the main challenges we receive from the story of Esther and Mordecai, especially our passage in chapter 4, is to ask ourselves: What is *my* role in the pursuit of God's Dream for peace? What is mine to do? We can see God working in the background in this story and then we can see the characters of Esther and Mordecai, people placed in prominent positions, play

prominent roles. But we also see the community around Esther and Mordecai playing a supporting role.

I have long been intrigued by the supporting cast in biblical stories. Growing up, I internalized the idea that in order to make my life count, in order to prove my faith, I needed to be like one of the main characters in the Bible. I needed to be the Moses, the David, the Paul and do amazing things to show my faith. And somewhere along the line I realized the unhealthy motivation behind this for me, and I recognized the harm this idea and pressure was doing to myself and my faith. This is perhaps a story for a different time but my point is that I came to a place of recognizing that while there are these famous biblical characters that receive most of the air time, there is also a host of just regular, ordinary people doing their best to live in light of the reality of God, doing their best to live faithful and loving lives in their context. Characters that may never be emphasized and yet play their parts in the story and from whose stories we can benefit.

So when it comes to the Esther story and this question of what is ours to do in the pursuit of God's Dream of Peace for our world, I want to emphasize that we all have unique and varied roles to play. There may be times when we are in a prominent position where we can enact large-scale change, moving the needle in big ways toward greater peace and justice. And there will be times when we are in a position where we can simply move the needle in small ways and support others doing so as well. Either way, one of the questions I want us to ask ourselves in response to this story is: what is mine to do in terms of pursuing God's Dream of Peace for our world? For our community? For our families?

So that is one thing I draw from this story. The other part I want to reflect on is the violence. It is hard for me to read some of these violent stories from scripture and especially hard when I see violent stories from the Bible used to justify violence and harm today. I wish this story read that the king simply cancelled the order and the plan for any violence was simply stopped. But that's not how the story reads. Instead we see the same violence just with the roles of perpetrator and victim flipped. So if we're talking about God's Dream of Peace…this cannot be it.

But, isn't this what we continue to see in our world? Too often when peace is talked about today it isn't with the intention of there being peaceful security and flourishing for *all* parties. It isn't with the intention of ending *all* violence. Instead, it is peace in the sense of just reversing the roles of perpetrator and victim. Peace is taken to mean, instead of *me* experiencing violence and harm, the violence and harm will be inflicted on others, on whoever is deemed the enemy. *This* idea of 'peace' plays a role in so much of the violence we see in our world today. As long as we are not the ones suffering, as long as we are not the one being harmed or experiencing violence, then all is well. But this isn't God's ultimate Dream of Peace for the world…so what is?

Walter Brueggemann wrote, "**the central vision of world history in the Bible is that *all of creation is one*, every creature in community with every other, *living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature***." (as quoted in Randy Woodley's 'Shalom and the Community of Creation,' p. 19). I love that. All creation living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature. Randy Woodley says simply:

"**God's dream is a world in which all creation lives in accordance with the way of shalom**." (p. 20).

God's Dream of Peace for the world: Shalom for the entire Community of Creation. Right and harmonious relationships between all members of this community of creation. Between God and us, between each other and all people, within ourselves, with the natural world.

This is not a peace that is satisfied as long as it is not myself or my chosen people group who isn't suffering, but is a holistic peace for all. "**Living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature**." (Brueggemann).

And how does God move us toward this dream? How does God invite us to imagine and participate in this alternative reality (Leader, p. 36)? This is where I see this Esther story intersecting with Advent. Again quoting Randy Woodley who says, "**Jesus, the shalom Christ who brings a shalom kingdom, is God's final answer to a broken and fragmented world**." (Woodley, p. 24).

Advent is this season where we anticipate celebrating the coming of the Christ who is called Emmanuel, 'God with us,' God-Made Flesh. With this in mind I have sometimes referred to Jesus as Love Made Flesh. And we could even say, in light of our theme today, Peace Made Flesh.

Jesus the Christ puts flesh to the idea of God's Dream of Peace for the world. They do this through walking the earth with humanity, showing compassion to those suffering, showing hospitality and welcome to those excluded, showing love for enemies, pursuing justice for the oppressed, and committing themselves to non-violence in the pursuit of holistic peace. We can see what God's Dream of Peace looks like when we look at the life and the words of Jesus the Christ, whose coming we anticipate and celebrate during Advent and Christmas.

Conclusion:

So while this passage from Esther is a strange one to reflect on during Advent I think it can lead us to imagine what God's Dream of Peace looks like, even by way of contrast. It can help us reflect on a grander vision for peace than what we often see in the world, or even in parts of Scripture.

It can cause us to pause and ask ourselves: What is mine to do, what is ours to do as a community, in the pursuit of God's Dream of Peace? What is the role I am invited to play? What are the opportunities before me?

And it can cause us to reflect on who Jesus the Christ is as Peace Made Flesh and what their words and life reveal to us about God's Dream.

As we continue through this Advent season, anticipating the coming of the Christ, may we be inspired again to dream God's dreams for this world and accept our invitation to help bring this about, in small and big ways, as we have opportunity.

Benediction:

As we go from here, may we follow after Peace Made Flesh, dreaming God's dream of peace for the entire Community of Creation and living this dream out as we have opportunity. And may we know God's peace ourselves. Amen.

Readings:

1. Esther 4:1-9
2. Esther 4:10-17

References

Leader Magazine. Fall 2026. Advent-Epiphany Worship Resources: God's Dream. Central Plains Mennonite Conference Worship Resource Team.

NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible. 2016. Zondervan.

Woodley, Randy. 2012. Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.