

How Is Esther's Story Our Story

Let me ask you something:

Have you ever felt like you just don't fit in, or you don't belong - maybe you don't fit in a space you're at, in a job, among people, maybe in the world as a whole. I asked recently: ... **when have you felt completely out of place in the world or your environment?** And I invite you to think about it now ...

Maybe you feel this way now ...

In a **pandemic** world, in a **political** world

- You don't identify with one side - or *do* but don't understand how others could feel the way they do - people you love

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In a **technological** world

- My cell phone upgrade that I can't figure out how to answer or make a call on.

Frequent responses I heard were - **imposter's syndrome** - which I could relate to.

This is when you think 'who am I to ... share the word of God? - teach a bunch of grad school students, write a book on ...' Maybe 'what if I'm not skilled enough, qualified enough?' 'why am I going back to school? You doubt your abilities - you wrestle with your self-image, the expectations of you - with your doubts, fears and you feel like an imposter to the life or role you are supposed to play.

My friend Bethany shared: (condense)

I've spent pretty much my whole life feeling like I don't really fit in anywhere being an adult 3rd culture kid. (despite being born in Ecuador) I didn't really fit in in Ecuador, because, despite being born there, because English was still my main language and my appearance was very different from most. Here in the US, I don't fit well because I tend to have a more global, diverse perspective that a lot of people don't understand. I get frustrated that I get treated better than immigrants from South/Central American countries, despite having been born there and speaking Spanish fluently,

There is an official name for this - it being a **hidden immigrant**.

And those who are born into the technology of our time (my children) are **digital natives** - the rest who are adapting are **digital immigrants**.

So many names ... do much disconnect - it's no wonder we are stressed, confused, isolated.

Let me tell you briefly my story and experience.

For me, I recall a time when I felt most 'lost' hand out of place in my life ... When we were pregnant with our first child, she passed away just weeks before her due date. I had been in the process of leaving a job so I could be at home with her. So I found myself in this really confusing space of having neither a child nor a job.

Nothing in my life nor my world made sense to me.

And it affected my faith and my prayer life too. I was so hurting and confused that I didn't know what to ask for, what to give thanks - I had nothing. So I just showed up. I was present.

I don't say that because I'm a hero for doing that - that was absolutely *all that I had* at the time. Just showing up.

We all have these stories, these times. When life doesn't make sense, when our plans fall apart. And I love the church because many of you walked alongside me then, and you do now - and that's the power and witness to the gift of a **faith community**.

Sometimes we lack close relationships with others.

Other times we question our ability to do the job required of us.

We simply feel out of place. We fear that we will never feel at home.

Esther understands.

If ever there was someone with a strong sense of place and destiny, it is Esther.

However, for many of her years, she did not realize that God had a special place for her to serve Him.

Brief overview of Esther:

Are you familiar with the story/context of Esther? King Xerxes (**Zersies** = Hebrew name) who is ruling in Persia, modern day Iran.

- He gets rid of his wife (current queen) because she doesn't come when he asks her too.
- He makes decrees about what women should do, how they should obey,
- All the beautiful people are sent to him to find a new wife.
- Esther's parents had died and she was raised by kind (and Jewish) Mordcai - a cousin who raises her as his own child ... which speaks to his character and compassion.
- Esther is a Jewish woman - one of God's chosen people who had been exiled in the past and cast out, they are God's chosen people but in constant conflict with the rulers of the land.
- Esther is chosen from the others for her beauty to be queen - *do you think maybe she experienced imposter syndrome???*

- Haman becomes the king's right hand man and he's evil. He sees that Morticai won't bow to him, knows he's Jewish - issues all the Jews to be slaughtered which the king doesn't seem to know about.
- If you GO to the king without being called to the king, you'll be killed.
- Morticai tells Esther she MUST go to the king to save her people, the Jewish people.

(Esther told Morticai) - Esther 4:11

"All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days."

*Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. **If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"***

*Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. **If I must die, I must die.**"*

Mordecai's words changed the way Esther felt about herself. He asks her 'maybe you were born for this??!' For the first time, she realized that God had a place for her. **Her hesitation was replaced with direction.** She was ready to take action.

Esther came to realize that her **privileges** were not just for her *pleasure*. **She had been put in the PALACE for a purpose.**

So she turns to God (she fasts for guidance and direction) and then she is BOLD in her action - if I die, so be it.

What does this mean for us?

You may not understand God's planning and purpose for your life. That was certainly true for me.

If you are in a season of life where you don't yet understand God's plan, take heart.

Media:

Just because you don't understand God's plan for your life doesn't mean God doesn't have one or doesn't care.

I think Esther - the woman who came from no family - was a **foreigner in her home land**, who defied the rules of the land to save her people - (you'll have to read the end of the story on your own!) but she succeeds, the king sees Haman's plot - saves her people and Haman's plot against Jewish people falls back upon him and he's killed.

She would say having lived through this that **"No place is out of place when you're in God's place."**

So how is Esther's story our story?

God not only has a place for us; **God has placed us where God needs us.**
The decision is ours as to whether we will do what we can where we are.

When you realize God's purpose for your life, you feel empowered. As Esther did.

Pre-Pandemic Zoom: Emily's story

In January I became aware of the handful of women in our church that were newly engaged but not often able to participate in connection groups because of young children/infants, working husbands. I had a nudge to try something strange - an online group to connect them.

If you recall we did a Lenten study - "baggage"? I decided to offer a baggage small group for 6 weeks to maybe meet this need. I panicked with the online platform and bought a paid version in case we ran over.

Our first Zoom small group took place on March 5th. There were 9 people that expressed interest in trying out this "Zoom" thing and an online small group option.

You guys - this was March 5th, 2020! This was only weeks before we shut everything down and transitioned everything online. Does that give you goosebumps?

We had 9 people trained on Zoom and a paid account established. This truly was an army of God and I am reminded over and over that God chooses those who are willing - and who say 'yes'.

Emily Kauffman was one of those such people - she had been in the Zoom groups, and became a Zoom trainer getting our fitness class online, troubleshooting Zoom problems, getting the women's small groups online, creating Zoom cheat sheets, patiently talking through tech problems on the phone. Emily said her family teased her because she was the least tech savvy person among them and she was training a whole church to move online!

God used Emily, like God used Esther.

I wish I had more time to unpack Esther's story further in so many more ways.

For Esther - she speaks to me and her story is *my* story because she knows what it means to be a **leader for God as a woman** - she knows what it's like to step into a space she is not sure she has the authority to, but she does so boldly because of her faith.

Many Christian denominations do not support (or even allow) women in leadership of the church. Fortunately the UMC does, but we still have work to do. So I often step into these uncomfortable - challenging - spaces too. A friend also shared what it's like to be a man in the main office of his school - and the only man. So this can be a challenge for any gender.

I didn't go to church when I was growing up - I was the friend of the kids that we have here periodically, so I never would have thought I would have been a pastor in a church. And I went through time when I was lost and confused and I didn't know if we would ever *have* children.

And it doesn't escape me that the voice that I'm called to the table to speak for is that of the *children* now as I moved into a leadership role in the church and community in this area. And then, it was *through a ministry with children*, that **God brought me to the table** and to a leadership role in the church.

In my story now - being a woman in ministry, I often am the *only female at the table* - but I know that God called me and placed me at the table. And that voice speaks louder to me than the voice of confusion or feeling like an imposter (most days...).

So you may often feel lost, or unqualified, or ill-equipped, or out of place. But God IS at work in our world. **And you ARE exactly where you need to be - God has a place for you.**

Brene Brown says that "daring greatly" is being both **courageous** and **afraid** at the same time and the things that we tell ourselves tend to *keep us and our dreams small*.

I don't think that God has small dreams or jobs for us. Part of *showing up* means that you will fail. And there's a lot of cheap seats in our culture for those who are willing to stand by and watch and criticize.

But I think if we want to live into the place that God has for us, we have to be **present** (even if it's *all* you have at the time). We have to be **vulnerable**, and vulnerability is terrifying but it means that you're showing up and that's what counts. The alternative is to live a life that is not authentically yours and not being open to what God has in store for you.

We live in a culture that often leads us to believe that we are not enough, **but God says we ARE more than enough**, if we are willing.

Esther would say - and I want you to know - **God does have a place for you.**

Amen.