

For Such a Time as This

Esther 4:4-17

Center Church, Hartford

October 25, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Rochelle A. Stackhouse

What could you do if you weren't afraid you weren't enough? What could you do if you let your imagination soar and then found ways to follow it with your feet? In the midst of the train wreck that is 2020 and whatever follows in 2021, how can we move closer to the Beloved Community as a congregation in greater Hartford?

These kinds of questions were central to our visioning gatherings back in 2018 and 2019. We imagined; we found some "Big Ideas"; we began to plan for ways to live into them, including an innovative new leadership model for our clergy and staff, with both a "traditional" pastor and a staff member dedicated to connecting more closely with others around us in greater Hartford as well as our children and youth.

Despite the fact that the coming of the pandemic dampened our move into more innovative worship and music as we had originally imagined it, we have been forced into different kinds of innovation that have borne interesting fruit, including many visitors to our online services! Despite the fact that teams and committees have not been able to meet in person, our search team has worked through the pandemic and is sending our job description out into the world this next week! And our new 1636 Heritage Partnership, a non-profit formed to support the maintenance and preservation of the buildings, has applied for a grant to fund its first project (the fixing of the portico at the Meeting House) and is launching its first event on November 15, though virtually and not in person. Despite the fact that our children are not gathering in our building for Sunday School, your Faith Formation team has worked hard to bring them programming on Zoom! Despite the fact that our Sunday dinner could not be held as usual with guests inside, Carrie and volunteers have served people every Sunday by getting creative with take-out

meals. Despite the fact that large gatherings are limited, GHIAA has continued to build capacity and organized Black Lives Matter protests as well as working on legislation for this session of the State Legislature and is planning a gathering to strategize on issues for November 12.

You see, everything has not come to a stop, and we have found new and creative ways to live into our mission as articulated by our two priorities voted on over a year ago: strong and creative worship and working to become the Center of Hartford by connecting all around us. But we have so much more to discover in God's service than we have even begun!

Yes, our numbers are smaller than they were 25 years ago, both in terms of active members and dollars. Yes, we have many expenses and details to maintain these two large buildings. Yes, the problems of greater Hartford seem mammoth in the face of who we are and what we have. Despite that, we have said we believe this church has a mission to work here in the Center of the city, serving God, each other, God's creation, and all the people around us.

Queen Esther thought that she was not enough, that she did not have enough: enough power, influence, strength of body, mind and spirit to take on the mammoth task her Uncle had set for her of convincing the King to save her people from genocide. She was afraid for her life as well. Mordecai told her that if she did not act, then he was sure God would find some other way, but that it just might be that she was put in the King's palace for such a moment as this. She wasn't there to gain riches or have everyone admire her beauty. She was there to do a hard and potentially world-changing thing. She asked Mordecai to gather her people and fast and pray for God to give her what she needed to do what was needed. They did. She did. And the rest is history.

We like to tell historical stories around here, of Thomas Hooker and his brave companions. Of Frederick Douglass speaking on our lawn. Of becoming Open and Affirming to the LGBTQ community. I

wonder, 50 years hence, what stories will they tell about us in our time. Will there be stories about how we went boldly into the future, not afraid we were not enough? That each of us searched our hearts to find where God needed us to be active in love in just such a time as this? That our generosity of time, spirit, money and love made a difference against all odds in 21st century Connecticut?

I believe those stories are possible. I believe in you, and I believe God does, too. I believe you are more than a beautiful building and deep history. I will not be here to see how this all comes out, but I am so excited to watch from afar! Those of you who will be here, this is up to you. For such a time as this, and all the times to come.

Madison is going to sing a song that was written to accompany the Esther story. It's a song about boldness, overcoming the fear of not being enough. Listen to these words, and then ask yourselves again: What could you do if you weren't afraid you weren't enough? What could you do if you let your imagination soar and then found ways to follow it with your feet, your hands, your voices, your spirits, your resources, and your lives? God is standing on tiptoe, waiting. Amen.