

In Control?

- What factors in our lives are beyond our control?
 - and what is (or feels) within our control?
 - (background, up-bringing, early education, health, friends, relationships, priorities, accident, work colleagues...)
- Emotional effects of dysfunctional family are often discussed, on radio and TV, and even within church (Road to Maturity course...)
 - generally speaking better, more psychologically healthy, to be aware
 - but it can drift into being an excuse.... "it's just the way I am!"

Esther

- Which brings us to Esther!
- What factors in Esther's life were in her control, and what outside?
 - she is an orphan, without natural parents, taken in by her cousin Mordecai
 - place she lived was outwith not only her individual control, but also her people's control - she was in exile, a refugee almost
 - political situation into which she was about to be plunged was also outwith her control - recap on the palace/national politics of Vashti's refusal to come at the drunken king's whim...
 - even once she was in the palace, she had no real control over the opposition she would face - king acted to elevate Haman without consulting Esther, without any possibility of her influencing the situation

Analogy: Next Top Model show

- I suppose the nearest analogy to Esther's situation we would have today is someone coming up to a girl in the street and talent spotting them as a future top model...
- with many of the associations of where the balance of power in such relationships are, the dangers of the spotter/agent/whatever exploiting the model in various ways, whether financial (sign-up fees) or sexual (topless shots or worse) or around power and control (they direct the model's life, movement, even diet...)
- Much of the same imbalance of power existed for Esther:
 - huge opportunity, and certainly glamorous on the outside...
 - but a dangerous opportunity, a life fraught with danger
- What impact could her decisions make?
 - was she just caught up in her circumstances?

Mordecai

- While we are focusing on Esther this evening, we do need to detour via Mordecai!
 - not only because of his direct part in the story (suggesting to Esther that she not reveal her Jewish nationality, his overhearing and passing on the news of the plot against the king, as well as his unwillingness to bow to Haman)
 - but also because he had raised Esther; she was like a daughter to him
 - from whom did she adopt values and priorities, from whom did she learn of the God of her people? **From Mordecai**
- He is a man of integrity, of dignity, and of loyalty to God:
 - he has common sense, and knows how to operate within the context of a hostile environment
 - he is someone who sticks with what he believes, even when it brings danger his way
 - but he is also someone who is generous to his enemies, saving the king's life...
 - and he demonstrates leadership, calling out of Esther that potential that he has no doubt nurtured, never realising it would be for such a time as this!
- And though he needs to prompt and guide Esther at points in the narrative, it is

clear how she has learned from him some of the same values:

- (even just in the respect she affords to him, not now considering herself above her former life...)
- and now she has opportunity and occasion to put into practise what she has learned

Back with Esther!

- And so we are back with Esther, facing her choice:
 - Mordecai has asked her to go and speak to the king, breaking protocol, and risking the fate of her predecessor Vashti
 - and beg for mercy... in the face of the king's established favour towards Haman...
- Someone who has been powerless all her life
 - who could have learned to let things happen to her... to become passive, rather than active, in facing her future...
 - being asked to step right out on a limb, into real danger
- What will she do?
 - in some ways, the whole of the first four chapters comes to a head in **4:15-16** and Esther's reply to Mordecai's challenge
 - if this was a film there would be dramatic music, a pregnant pause before we hear what Esther will do...
- She chooses to act:
 - but it is most instructive as we look at how, or in what way, she makes that choice

1. She gathers spiritual support

- Not going alone
 - as we'll see in second, it is not merely the support of friends, or like-minded individuals, even those who also face death as a result of this proclamation
 - it is the support of those who are on the same spiritual wavelength, who like Esther will seek God
 - *(do we?)*

2. She puts her trust in God

- Fasting:
 - fasting is wrapped up with prayer, and particularly prayer seeking God for something serious...
 - so together with the other Jews, she is explicitly placing her trust in God
 - and that is done by praying...
 - *(do we?)*

3. She commits herself to action

- She will actually act on her faith, and live as if she trusted God for her future...
 - *(do we?)*

Conclusion

- What do you tend to do when circumstances hem you in?
 - what are your options?
- Do you believe that your life is safe in God's hands so that you can act even in the face of danger?