

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SALISBURY, NORTH CAROLINA  
APRIL 1, 1984

What a joy it is to be here this morning at the invitation of the United Methodist Women, who are doing such a marvelous job. I'm so pleased to participate in the United Methodist Women's Centennial Celebration and to look out on the warm, smiling faces of family and friends, who have loved me, guided me, helped me in so many ways.

Salisbury will always be home. My roots are here. This is where I find my strength and my renewal.

There is no place on earth that means as much to me. There are no people who mean more to me.

I thank you for the warmth of your friendship - and for being here this morning as this novice steps into the pulpit for the second time in her life.

May we bow heads together for a moment of prayer:

----Thank you, Father, for the privilege of worshipping together this morning and for the opportunity which I have to share a little of my spiritual journey with fellow travelers who mean so much to me. I thank you for this congregation, its minister and the staff of this church and the profound

impact they have on our lives and on this community which I hold so dear. Bless our time together this morning, dear Lord, for we ask it in Christ's name and for his sake. Amen.

Most of you here know Johnny Hanford, my nephew. While visiting John at Gordon-Conwell Seminary some time ago, I was privileged to hear a sermon by Reverend Gordon McDonald of Grace Chapel, Lexington, Massachusetts and I want to share some of his message from the Book of Esther with you.

I'm reminded of an old story about the chicken and the pig. They were enjoying a marvelous parade ... banners, flags, marching bands, when the chicken turns to the pig and says, "Let's do something special to show our thanks."

"Like what?", the pig asked.

"How about a nice breakfast of ham and eggs?", the chicken said.

The pig answered, "For you, that only involves an offering. For me it means total commitment."

Esther is a small, obscure book that tells one story about a planned attack on the Jews, the people of God.

A woman had to make a decision regarding total commitment of her life.



Now there was a certain Jew named Mordecai who appears to have been a civil servant in the court of a Persian king. Actually Mordecai was a lobbyist. This man had a beautiful, accomplished young cousin named Esther, whose father and mother were dead, and whom Mordecai had adopted into his family and raised as his own daughter.

Through an unusual contest, whereby many young women went before the King, Esther was selected as the new queen and indeed, she was known for the finest qualities of womanhood.

She became somewhat isolated in her magnificent apartment, surrounded by servants — unlike Mordecai, who was out amidst the people, picking up pieces of information from many sources.

Mordecai learned that one of the top men in government had elaborate plans to put to death as many of Mordecai's own people, the Jews, as he could find. It was a careful plan: letters, messages would be sent out to each province in its own language or dialect — enormous system — highly organized effort — that on a given day, tens of thousands would be slaughtered — young and old, women and children.

Mordecai immediately sent a message to Esther which said — You may be the only person who can reverse the decision of the King and of his officials, to bring our people out of this situation and give them salvation.

What is there about Mordecai that makes him desperately concerned for his people? Is he just worried about his own neck? Of course not. He may be concerned about that, but he's concerned about people being killed and plundered.

Why so concerned? You and I have the same kind of information today — we don't seem to really share the concerns of a Mordecai. Every day we read in the paper of revolutions and boat people and starvation. We have more information than Mordecai would ever have — yet this man is wrapped up in concern for his world. What makes Mordecai the kind of man that he was? For one thing, this was not the first time Mordecai was acquainted with suffering. Learn in Chapters 1 and 2 that Mordecai had been in the Jerusalem dispersal. He had seen first hand, with his eyes, what happens when a foreign army enters a city — plunders — takes its people — killing, stealing — plowing a major city under.

Mordecai had been victimized by all that. You can almost hear his words leaping from the Bible — Never again! That's what sensitizes — when you see how people are being treated; when you come firsthand in contact with poverty, oppression and injustice, and the lostness of people spiritually, you can never sleep the same again. How do we develop the sensitivity today that leads us to total commitment? If we remain anesthetized, it may be that the greatest judgement of all will rest on us.



So Mordecai had a commitment, even at his own risk, to stop this.

His message goes out to Esther to try to persuade the King to call off these terrible deeds.

Her response: "All the King's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the King in the inner court without being summoned, the King has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the King to extend the golden scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the King."

In other words, Esther was telling Mordecai that she couldn't do what he asked. Chances are that if she went to the King, she might lose her head! Mordecai doesn't understand that -- he has already seen people lose their heads. Confounds him ...

No sympathy for Esther's refusal to use her influence and connections.

I'm somewhat sympathetic -- her resistance is understandable since she hadn't seen the suffering. She had a lot of things going for her. She had a beautiful apartment, servants, a comfortable life -- and when you get all of those things around you, it builds a resistance to anything which might threaten that comfort and security and safety.

I know how she felt -- and perhaps you do, too. I'm concerned about my health and security and like a comfortable home -- a car to go to my office and to places of pleasure. I like the comfortable life. It's a very disturbing thing to think of going before the King.

There are three parts to Mordecai's answer to Esther.

First: Esther, think not that you'll escape this predicament any more than other Jews -- everything you have can be wiped out if this comes to pass -- all the comforts and the pleasures. Mordecai is saying simply: If the thing that stops you from being a servant to thousands of people is your comfort and your security, forget it, lady -- for you're no more secure in there than we are out here. Esther shares the predicament.

For us, I think this says: All the things we treasure and hold on to, instead of generously sharing with those who need them more, can be lost at a moment's notice if we are not handling them responsibly. We are custodians of God's gifts.

2nd theme: Privilege: If you keep silent, Esther, at a time like this, deliverance and relief will arise from some other quarter, but you and your father's house will perish.

God has given you, Esther, the privilege to perform. It is a privilege



to serve Him; God does not need our help. He's not dependent on us.

We seem to think: Poor God -- let's get out and help Him a little before this world crumbles around Him. At the end of my life, I don't want to look back and realize that God gave my role and my opportunity to another, because I didn't perform. That's one thing that drives --- me to keep trying.

And the third theme is Providence. Mordecai says: Esther, who knows -- you may have been placed where you are for such a time as this. God calls on people, and places them in a certain matrix of circumstances and says -- here's the moment. Now do your thing! Providence. What responsibility does this engender from me?

Christian friends -- what responsibility is expected from you and me because God came to us in Jesus Christ and enabled us to hear the Gospel? What responsibilities do we have when we live in a country like the U.S.A., where we can worship freely and, as a country, enjoy very large portions of the world's resources in contrast to those who are intellectually and spiritually dead in many parts of the world? Mordecai's message to Esther is a message to a congregation like our's today. Don't you realize that God may have brought you to a time like this, to participate in the salvation of many.

Mordecai got through to Esther -- Her response: "Go, gather together

all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the King, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

THAT'S total commitment -- all the way from being concerned with the things she had, to the point where she was prepared to finally give everything -- even her life, to serve God. As many of you know, the King held out the golden scepter and granted Esther's request to save her people.

No matter how old I am, no matter how poor or how inarticulate, what does God want from me?

God wants TOTAL COMMITMENT -- if he can't use me, he'll use someone else -- indeed, the story of Esther is a very humbling one.

I often wonder: Am I using this period of public service to ensure in every way I can, a better life for all Americans through the policies and programs I deal with each day? Am I fully responding to opportunities to stand up for the Lord, to witness?

My witness contains no road to Damascus experience.

My spiritual journey began many years ago, right here in a Carolina



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home where Sunday was the Lord's day, reserved for acts of mercy and necessity, and the Gospel was as much a part of our lives as fried chicken and azaelas in the spring.

My grandmother, who lived within two weeks of her 100th birthday, was my role model.

- \* Remember many Sunday afternoons with other neighborhood children over lemonade and cookies -- reading the Bible, playing Bible games, praying together.
- \* She practiced what she preached, and lived her life for others. In a tragic accident, Mom Cathey lost a son at the hands of a drunk driver. The insurance policy on his life built a hospital wing in a far-off mission in Pakistan. Although Mom was not at all a wealthy woman, almost anything she could spare went to ministers at home and missions abroad. When it became necessary, in her 90's, to go into a nursing home, she welcomed the opportunity. There might be some people there who didn't know the Lord, and she could read the Bible to them.
- \* I never heard an unkind word escape her lips in all the years I knew her; I never saw an ungracious deed mar her path. My grandmother was a perfect role model.

And because my grandmother seemed perfect, it was only natural that I wanted to follow in her footsteps. I remember playing the piano for the Men's Bible Class, serving as President of MYF. I was a regular at Sunday School and church. I loved the summers at Lake Tunaluska. But as we move along, how often in our busy lives something becomes a barrier to total commitment of one's life to the Lord! In some cases it may be money, power, prestige ...

In my case, my career became of paramount importance. I worked very hard, to give my best effort, to excel, to achieve. I became a "need achiever". And a perfectionist to boot! It wasn't that I had to reach a particular goal, it was just that everything had to be done to my standards of perfection. I think we should strive to do our best at whatever we undertake. But a perfectionist may take it to extremes, fail to see point of diminishing returns, worry about the past and anticipate the future with anxiety -- that I might do less than my best.

I tried to control everything in my life, surmount every difficulty, foresee every problem, realize every opportunity. That's pretty tough on your family, your friends, your fellow workers and on yourself. My perfectionism began crowding out what Mom Cathey had taught me were life's most important priorities.

I was blessed with a beautiful marriage, a challenging career... and yet ... only gradually, over many years, did I realize what was



missing from my life -- that this ego-centered life was not a source of genuine satisfaction, that my life was threatened with spiritual starvation. Serving God, after all, requires self-abandonment. And self-abandonment doesn't come naturally to "need achievers" and perfectionists.

I read of David. How close he was to God, how God protected him as he went out to meet the giant Goliath, how God guided him. Then David got busy. He was able to look after himself. He felt no need for God. And that's when his troubles began.

Well, I got down on my knees and prayed -- Lord, I don't understand -- I just know I can't handle this alone. Slowly God led me, no faster than I was ready, to people and circumstances, which could help me.

Ed Bauman, pastor of Foundry Methodist Church and his congregation helped me to see what joy there is when God is the center of life. And all else flows from that center. A spiritual growth group, suggested by Ed, gave me renewed strength as I met each Monday night with Christians who shared my need to stretch and grow spiritually, and I was strengthened through Bible study with other Senate wives.

I know I'm moving now in my spiritual journey -- But I'm a long way from where I want to be.

Recent New York Times article reported that I debated several days whether to accept my current position in the Cabinet. I did ... but not for the reasons given in the article. It was a great source of joy to me that I was led to seek, with several Christian friends, God's will for my life. I could not imagine undertaking such a task if it were not within His plan for my life — for I knew it would require strength, wisdom and courage beyond my own. Together we prayed, read scripture, and sought to understand the will of God through Christian fellowship, an experience which was extremely helpful and reassuring in taking on some very heavy challenges.

When the pressures mount, I often think of Scotland's beloved Olympic runner, Eric Liddell, portrayed so beautifully in Chariots of Fire. He asked the question, "So where does the power come from to finish the race?" and he answered, "From within." For as Isaiah 40:31 tells us, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

I keep Proverbs 3:5-6 on my desk and often, as I wrestle with a tough problem, I think of Mom Cathey ... Her sleepless nights... This is a favorite of both hers and mine ... "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy ways." That's all we need. I can let go of that problem and let God provide the guidance.



In Matthew 5:48, God says, "Be perfect as I am perfect; holy as I am holy." That's a different kind of perfectionism isn't it? Where do we get that kind of perfection? You know, the Christian life isn't difficult -- it's impossible. Christ alone fully lived the Christian life. And he's willing to live again in each of us. We must recognize that which is truly worthy of our TOTAL COMMITMENT.

You know, many today are searching for their identity. We try so hard to please, to conform to what others want us to be -- that I'm afraid we often don't know ourselves; the beautiful person that God created us to be. We need to find our identity in our values; we have a spiritual worth. We are the children of a living God who calls us by name, who loves us more than we can imagine, and who created us for a purpose. That is who you are. That's who I am.

This is a time of great challenges in our world -- many difficult problems confront us. But there appears to be a renaissance taking place in this country -- a return to religion. Your influence could mean the difference in many lives -- and each of us has a circle of influence. Don't you realize that God may have brought you to a time like this, to participate in the salvation of many. The world is ripe and ready for men and women who recognize that they are not immune from predicaments of the day, men and women who are willing to accept the privilege of serving and who are ready to see that the providence of

God may have brought them to such a time as this.