

2009 National Sermon Contest Winner

In her sermon, “Something Happened at the Banquet,” Protestant pastor Rev. Rhedrick lifts up the biblical character of Vashti who is not well known in Christian circles. She is celebrated by Jews along with Esther in the Festival of Purim. Rev. Rhedrick offers her listeners a model of resistance that can fundamentally change not only individuals but also communities. This is the resistance we need to challenge violence against women.

Something Happened at the Banquet

Esther 1:2–12

by Rev. Glencie S. Rhedrick

Have you ever been invited to participate in an organization, group, or social outing just to find yourselves having to make a decision that could possibly affect the rest of your life?

In other words, as we go through life, we will find ourselves having to make life changing decisions. As a young high school student I recalled having to make a tough decision while hanging out with one of my friends. I was put into a compromising situation, where I had to choose to go somewhere I was told not to go or follow my friends so I could be accepted.

I chose to say “no.” Saying “no” set my life on a different course.

Have you or a loved one ever experienced a situation in your life where you made a decision that changed the course of your life?

In our text today, we find Queen Vashti having a banquet. As she entertained the women, the king was in another part of the palace having a banquet for the men. We are never told what happened at her banquet; but we do know what happened at the king’s banquet: “The king gave a banquet for all the people from the greatest to the least; that were in the fortress of Susa.” Drinks were served in gold goblets of many designs and there was an *abundance* of royal wine. As we move further into the text we find that the free flowing wine altered the thought process of the king. In other words, he was intoxicated and some would say he was wasted. As a result the king sent seven of his eunuchs to bring the queen with her royal crown on her head so the king, the nobles and all the other men could gaze on her beauty. For the scripture says she was lovely or she, as we would say it today, she had it going on. Well, unbeknownst to the king, this request would change the course of time.

Now you see Queen Vashti understood the Persian custom, in that women were not allowed to parade themselves around the men. So now we know what happened at the king’s banquet.

But, do we know what happened at the Queen's banquet? That's the question for the morning. *What happened at the Queen's banquet?* I am so glad you ask. If you would allow me to use my *historical and spiritual* imagination, I would like to explore just what was going on at this women's banquet. The text described for us how the king's banquet was decorated. So if you will, I would think that Queen Vashti's banquet hall was decorated equally as well as the king's.

However, instead of the women drinking and sharing their many conquests, they were probably seated around a very long banquet table discussing the issues of women for their time. I am sure they knew the laws that prohibited them equal access to the men's boardrooms, court rooms and especially the king's palace unless summoned by his eunuchs. Let's just say for the sake of argument, the women were also sharing their thoughts about fair treatment by their mates in their homes, in the streets and in the marketplace. And let's just say that the women were tired of being mistreated and disrespected as well as not taken seriously simply because of their gender. Or perhaps they were discussing the humanitarian treatment of the Jews in the community. We really can't say we know what actually happened at the banquet, because the text does not pay any attention to the women or to Vashti until the King sends for her. His 7 eunuchs are to bring his beautiful Queen adorned in her crown to the palace so the men from the highest of rank to the everyday man to gaze on her beauty.

I just believe on that evening, there was a shift. After all, what was Vashti to say after hearing the women of the palace discuss their concerns about fair treatment for women, and others of different races, cultures and religious beliefs? Her only response could have been a resounding "no" to the king. The women now had a platform with issues of grave concern. A dramatic shift was about to take place. So the first thing we have learned about the Banquet is that the Queen sent a "NO" answer to the king. Why? Because for her to parade around in a room filled with men was demeaning, non productive and it meant she ignored the very concerns discussed at the women's banquet. To go to the king's banquet would not only send a message to the men but to the women at the banquet as well that they had no value and could be treated as property to be used, abused and then discarded at whim.

She was quite aware that some type of consequence would come her way. But she stood her ground. She took a risk which changed her life. But it is the introduction of the hand of God that we see at work here. As we who are about to witness a mighty situation, a change of lifestyle, job or career know, it doesn't mean the end but a sure beginning to what God has in store for us. Just look at the story in Esther. Queen Vahsti took a stand and said "no" to a powerful king, which resulted in her being banished from the palace. Her saying "no" also informs us that she valued herself as a person. Because she said "no," Queen Vashti paved the way for a new Queen to come on the scene. Her "no" response opened the door for the Jewish community to have a queen in the palace for a time such as this. This was Queen Esther. So in other words, if it were not for Queen Vashti there would be no Esther story in the Bible. Secondly, since the door is opened and the Queen is removed—God's plan is set into motion by Mordecai, who prepares his cousin to become the next queen. Seven years go by before Esther is selected by the king as his queen. You know the rest of the story.

Esther, initially, keeps her true identity a secret, but has to expose herself to save her people. This would not have been so if Queen Vashti had not taken a stand. The door is now opened for Esther to be in the right place at the right time to go before the king to end a plot to kill her people.

But before she even considers going before the king, the text informs us she asked her cousin, Mordecai to have the Jewish community to fast and pray for three days as she and her maidens will do the same. Here we see how God reminds us for today that in the midst of our trials and tribulation, it is necessary to seek Him through fasting and praying. In other words, don't worry about the economic situation, who is the president, governor or mayor. Seek God for direction as Esther did. By her taking the risk we learn that the King responded favorably to Esther and as you read the rest of the story we see the third and final outcome to this great spiritual journey. *A change is on the horizon.* A shift in power. The Jews escape annihilation, and a corrupt leader is found guilty. The intended victim is rewarded and ends up with his job. *A change is on the horizon.* All because the Queen said "no."

As we look at our journey as a people, we have Harriet Tubman, who said "no." "Before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave." "No" to slavery and "yes" to freedom; Dr. Martin Luther King said "no" to injustice and inequality and "yes" to equality and justice based on the content of our character. Fannie Lou Hamer said, "No, I am sick and tired of being sick and tired," and "yes" to death threats for Mississippians to have the right to vote. Rosa Park said, "No, I will not get up; I am tired of being treated like a second hand citizen." Obama said "no" to 8 more years of the Republican regime and made his campaign slogan "Yes We Can; it's time for a change." Oh yes, we have Queen Vashti to thank for taking a stand.

But we know the one who took the ultimate stand for us and He is Jesus Christ, because He too said "no" to oppression, injustice, inequality and ill treatment of the less fortunate. He said "no" to a religious culture that discriminated against the least fortunate. He said "no" to a government that ruled for the many and took advantage of the least. Jesus said "no," but "yes" to those who wanted change in their spiritual lives, physical lives and emotional lives. For Jesus said in John 10: 10: "I come that you might have life and have life more abundantly." Jesus went to the cross so that we will have an intercessor, access to the Father and eternal life. So when we are faced with an opportunity to stand, *stand* and take the consequences and watch the Hand of God open doors and provide change. We would not have the opportunity to know how a people prayed, fasted and heard from God without ever seeing his name in print. All of this because Queen Vashti said "no." Amen, Amen, Amen.

Let us pray!

Rev. Glencie S. Rhedrick is a native of Roswell, New Mexico. She completed her undergraduate studies at Johnson C. Smith University in May 1976 with a Bachelor of Arts degree (Cum Laude) in English. She continued her studies at the National Louis University in Evanston, Illinois, with a Master's of Science degree in Human Resources Management and Development in May 1986. While working at her company as a Realtor, she answered her call in 2003 to preach and was licensed at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. In the fall of 2004, Rev. Rhedrick began her journey in seminary at Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, where she earned her Masters of Divinity degree in May 2007. She was ordained in ministry in November 2007 by Dr. Ricky A. Woods, Senior Minister of First Baptist Church-West in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In 2008, she completed her residency as a level II Chaplain for the Carolinas HealthCare System. She continues to serve the Carolinas HealthCare System as chaplain throughout the system. She serves as the Bereavement Minister and trains others to walk with those who are suffering loss. She also provides an annual Celebration of Life service and Brunch for families to gather and share.

In addition, Rev. Rhedrick serves as the Youth Minister where she has taken on the task to develop a leadership and spiritual gift assessment for the youth. She was instrumental in organizing First Baptist Church-West's first youth revival.

Her ministry continues beyond the doors of her church as she volunteers her time and energies to many organizations. She is currently serving as Chair of the Interfaith Subcommittee for the Domestic Violence Advocacy Council, member of the Executive Board of the DVAC and member of the DVAC. She is also very active with Mecklenburg Ministries and was recently added to the Board of Directors to Mecklenburg Ministries.

In addition, Rev. Rhedrick currently writes a weekly column found in the faith section of QCityMetro.com entitled "Food 4 A Thirsty Soul," which provide words of encouragement and hope for the readers.