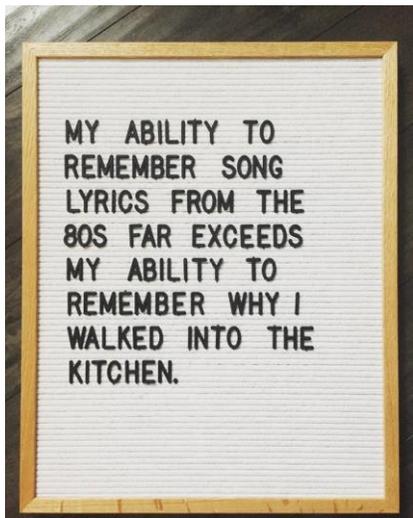


“The Guts Not to Fight Back”  
Text: Esther 4:6-17  
Sermon Series: Different Week 3

The Woodside Church

October 7, 2018

I came across this post a couple of weeks ago and had to laugh – for a couple of reasons.



1. Because not too long ago I got up from the kitchen table, walked through the family room towards the garage; stopped, and stood there for a moment. My daughter looked over at me and asked me what was wrong. After a second I admitted that I forgot what I was going to get. 2. A few days later I began to think about this sermon and I remembered an Andy Cappe comic strip that I hadn't read in, I don't know, 50 years?

And I quickly realized that I not only remembered it – but I remembered the words exactly. Sorry for the quality of the pictures. This wasn't easy to find online.

Panel 1 has an English "Bobby" hearing a commotion. # 2 shows the Bobby running, and then 3 finishes with the Bobby and Andy Capp standing over an unconscious man with the Bobby writing down Andy's explanation of what happened, "I thought he was going to hit me, so I hit him back, first." Now I know it's not a lot of words but give me some credit: 50 years later, and I remembered the words exactly.

Now I know that this is a comic strip, but it is an interesting response by Andy. He only assumed the guy was going to hit him so he reacted in a way that, let's face it, really

isn't right. Self-defense is supposed to be a response, but not a response to a feeling. And yet doesn't society often teach that? What's that old saying – the best defense is a Good offense. Sure – it's typically a sports phrase, but we use sports metaphors all the time. If you think you might be hurt, take a proactive approach to it and strike first. This could be physically or emotionally. If you think somebody plans to share what happened over the weekend with other people – get your story out there first; with your slant. Think your girl, or boy, friend is going to dump you – take the initiative. If you think somebody is going to hit you, attack first...

This isn't the only such phrase that we use. Ever heard the saying, "Don't get mad, get even." Why allow yourself to take that pain? Dish it back out, with an extra helping. Ever been hurt, or seen somebody get hurt? Isn't there often somebody standing by saying, "Are you going to take that?" Why? To provide the opportunity to get even.

That leads me to a third one, one that has always been a difficult one to deal with. The bully. How do you handle the bully? Take it and hope he, or she, goes away. Report it, and run the risk of retribution? Or strike back. When I was a kid there was a common saying/belief – it was said on many 70's tv shows. "Most bullies are actually cowards. Punch them in the nose and they'll respect you and leave you alone." Maybe. Or maybe next time they'll really clobber you.

I remember Jr High. He and I were kind of friends, sort of. But one day, kidding around, I made a comment. He didn't seem to think much of it, at first. But then his "toady" asked that famous question. "Are you going to take that?" This led to a punch on my arm. Ok, fine. Maybe I shouldn't have said it, and deserved it. But it didn't stop there. From then on every day for weeks, maybe longer, at some point during the school day, he'd come across me and slug me in that same spot. It really began to hurt. I wasn't a big guy back then. I was really skinny and not real strong. I was pretty fast, but that didn't usually help in a school hallway. I tried to avoid him, but he'd find me. I tried to talk him out of it. He'd say, "sure", and then hit me again. And I knew that if I struck back, I'd get it much worse. Maybe then he'd leave me alone. But maybe not. I didn't know what to do.

Esther had a similar story, but with much more potential dire consequences. She was a Jewish girl who lived around 470 BC during the time of Xerxes, King of Persia. Persia had taken the place of the Babylonian Empire - only bigger and more powerful. They did however allow many of the Israelites to go back to the Holy Land. Some stayed, as where they were had become their new homes. Mordecai, Esther's uncle and guardian, was one that decided to stay – but continued with his worship of God. However, Mordecai insisted that Esther hide her Jewish heritage, believing that she might be

singled out and persecuted. By staying where she was, Esther was noticed by Xerxes and was made his queen. Before you get all romantic about that, let me share that it wasn't as glorious as that may sound. Don't picture Queen Elizabeth here, or future queen Kate Middleton. Esther was probably around 14 years old and her role of queen wasn't the role that we are accustomed to today. She was one of many wives and the Queen designation was more of an acknowledgement that she was the most favored wife.

So what was Esther dealing with? One day Mordecai did not bow down and acknowledge Haman, King Xerxes 1<sup>st</sup> Minister. Angered by this, Haman went to Xerxes with a document that ordered the extermination of all Jews within the Persian Empire. Because he valued and trusted his minister so, Xerxes signed the document approving the action.

Esther 4:1

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly.

Esther did not know what was happening and tried to find out why Mordecai was acting the way he was. This wasn't easy for her because remember, Mordecai had forbidden her to reveal her Jewish ancestry. She had followed his instructions, as was only proper. But now she was facing a challenge and found it necessary to change the way she thought, and acted. She sent Hathak, who was one of the king's eunuchs, to find out what was distressing Mordecai.

So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. Esther 4:6-8

Remember Mordecai insisting that Esther hide her heritage? And now she's being told to change that tactic – right when it would be most dangerous for her. I can only imagine the fear that must be going through that young girl's mind.

Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, "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 they be put to death unless the king

extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”

So now in addition to the danger of her heritage, she is supposed to risk the king’s wrath by coming before him – unsummoned. Remember, this is not a marriage as we understand it. She hasn’t even been in the king’s presence for 30 days. How does she even know if she is still his “most favored wife.” She might still have a crown, but...

#### Esther 4:9-11 (NIV)

When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Break it down.

- Is Esther really safe? Remember that she has been asking Hathach, a servant of the king, to run messages back and forth between her and Mordecai. He had to know and while he may have had some loyalty to Esther, the king would inspire respect – and a healthy dose of fear.
- God is still watching over the Israelites. He has not turned his back on them. If Esther does not help here, and try to convince the king to reverse his edict, maybe God will just select another to be his hands and feet and serve Him in this. Then where does that leave Esther?
- Is this why she is here? Last week we had a coffee house with LivingSong. During that coffee house, LivingSong’s guitar player, Manny Garcia shared a testimony. One of the things he shared was how when we become followers of Christ we begin to want to serve, and do. By serving it doesn’t mean that we are going to get our ticket to heaven punched. Maybe by serving we are getting the opportunity to deliver something that God wants us to. He is putting us in a place where we can help somebody, or something.

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “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 attendants 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.”

She asks Mordecai to get the people of Susa to fast, along with her and her attendants. This is a way of calling out to God. Taking away things that are maybe getting in the way of our relationship with Him, so that we can become closer.

She agrees to go before the king. Dangerous or not, Esther realizes that this is the right thing to do. How often do we not do that? “It’s too dangerous. His actions surprised me. I’m not comfortable doing that.” We make, or find, excuses to avoid doing things

“If I perish, I perish”. She is leaving it in God’s hands. Trusting in Him, that no matter what happens, she is ok with the final result – at least as far as she is concerned.

So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.

As I said, I was at a difficult time with my nemesis. Keep hiding. Tell somebody what was happening. Fight back and see what happens. I did something different. I was attending Woodside youth group back then and what I did one weekend was pray. I prayed he’d stop hitting me that the pain would go away, that I would be left alone. And you know two weeks went by and I found out that his family had moved away – I never saw him again.

Here are four practical illustrations we can use about how Woodside is fighting evil and spreading good. One is something we’ve done in the past, one we can do during communion, one we can do with your growth group, and one is coming up.

1. Bucks County Opportunity Council – Woodside is being honored in November by BCOC as their Community Connector of the year – this recognizes the many ways we help neighbors make their way out of poverty
2. Praying for the world – Since this is “World Communion Sunday” we have put information about a country in each bulletin which they can read about and pray for during the communion service.
3. We are asking every growth group to adopt a mission cause as their participation in this year’s Church Has Left the Building. Instead of asking everyone to do mission on one day, we are asking every group to go out and serve at least one time before the end of the year. Our goal is to have every group adopt a mission by Nov. 4 the Sunday we normally leave the building.
4. Rise Against Hunger – On October 27 and 28 we invite all ages to help us fight the evil of hunger and spread 20,000 meals around the globe. Sign up on the Connection card.

Branch Rickey was the General Manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey decided that it was time to break the color barrier in baseball, for both financial reason but also because he believed it was the right thing to do. He began his search for the right player that would combine athleticism, skills and the right attitude. He knew that whoever the player was, he was going to face an unbelievable amount of hatred from fans and players alike. That player was going to have to take what was given – and prove that he belonged.

On August 28, 1945, Rickey signed Robinson to a minor league contract. Before signing Rickey made it clear how Robinson was going to have to act.

Rickey: "I know you're a good ballplayer. What I don't know is whether you have the guts."

Robinson: "Mr. Rickey, are you looking for a Negro who is afraid to fight back?"

Rickey, exploding: "Robinson, I'm looking for a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back."

Jackie Robinson came to the big leagues in 1947. And he was cursed at by fans, players and even umpires. Baseballs were thrown at his head so often his cap, they didn't wear helmets in those days, had protective plates sewn into the lining. And players routinely tried to spike him. But he stood up to it, as Rickey wanted him to, and gradually earned the respect from most players in the league.

But I also want to mention two other players – Dixie Walker and Pee Wee Reese. Dixie Walker was from the state of Georgia. Reese was another man of the south, from Kentucky. Both had reasons for not wanting Robinson. Walker was concerned because he was told that people would boycott his off season store if he played with a black man. Reese could potentially lose his job as shortstop to Robinson.

At the beginning of the 1947 season Walker organized a group of Dodgers who wrote a letter to Rickey demanding that either Robinson not take the field with them, or that they be traded. Throughout the season many of the players pulled back from their demands, but not Walker.

But unlike Walker, Reese took the position that if Robinson could help them win, then why shouldn't he play. One time prior to a game in Cincinnati, Robinson was being heckled ruthlessly by the fans. Reese, the captain of the team, went over to Robinson, engaged him in conversation, and put his arm around his shoulder in a gesture of support that silenced the crowd.

At the end of the 1947 season, after Robinson had earned the respect of almost all of the Dodgers, as well as many other players and fans, Rickey honored Walker's request and traded him to the last place Pittsburgh Pirates.

Pee Wee Reese played nine more seasons with Robinson as they both enjoyed Hall of Fame careers.

At the end of your life do you want to be known as somebody that puts their arm around the shoulder of somebody in need? Or do you want to be remembered as the guy that got traded to Pittsburgh?

Please pray with me.