

On the mind of the Rev. Canon Deacon Denise LaVetty...

Our Morning Prayer lectionary has been taking us through the Book of Esther. It's a favorite of mine. The Jews are an exiled people and Esther is an orphaned cousin of Mordechai who has "adopted" her into his care. Well, that wasn't much help when Esther was snatched away to be a pagan king's concubine.

Esther, by heritage a Jew, but now fully assimilated into a nonreligious culture, is at the mercy of a male-dominated political system. But she has a keen survival instinct and rises in royal favor. The life she's been forced into certainly breaks the rules of Torah (Jewish law), but she has had to acclimate herself to this to survive. Her Jewishness is hidden, is eliminated from her identity. She is leading a false life.

Esther finds herself in a dilemma when she discovers Haman's plot to annihilate the Jewish people, her people. Now she needs to gather whatever fragments of her true self are still intact and she needs to act.

Her plea to the king is "If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me – and the lives of my people – that is my request." I can hear the king replying "WHAT? Those are YOUR people? Well, THAT changes things!"

The book of Esther is unique, as it's the only Old Testament book that does not contain any mention of God, and so its religious significance is often in question. Seems kind of strange, right? A Bible book with no mention of God. Yet Esther conveys a message that's consistent with the reoccurring theme in the Bible – the survival and salvation of God's people.

While the absence of mention of God in this book has created challenges to interpretation, God's presence may be discerned in the loyalty, goodness, and triumph of the weak, the reversals of fortune where the good triumph over the wicked. Though God is not named, God can still be known.

Because the experience of Esther's people was turned "from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday" [referring to the Jewish celebration of "Purim"] the case can be made that God is present and active. Seems whenever the humble are uplifted and the haughty brought down, the case can be made that God is present and active. And it happens over and over, for example –

In the prayers of Hannah in the Hebrew Scriptures and Mary in Christian Scriptures, the belief is clear that God is in the business of lifting the oppressed and bringing down the oppressor.

As Hannah prepares to leave her young son in the care of Eli the priest, she prays, "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts up the needy from the ash heap" (1 Sam. 2:7–8a).

And as Mary anticipates the birth of Jesus, she prays the words we know as The Magnificat, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52–53).

There are other examples of such "Magnificat-like" prayers in the Bible, a recurring and empowering theme. These prayers tell us that if we're looking for evidence of God's presence, we do well to consider those times and places when there are great reversals and dramatic changes of fortune.

Right now, in our world, we could use a great reversal, a dramatic change. This week our city was under siege with paralyzing traffic due to the United Nations General Assembly. I've lived around a half mile from the U.N. for 33 years and it's never as bad as this year.

The heads of state, the diplomats, and their entourages are making this very on-the-surface, show of power. A friend told me she witnessed traffic crossing Central Park coming to a halt as a motorcade slowed to a crawl while the

passengers took photos. The show of power is just that – a show. A show that paralyzes a city and endangers lives. [Yes, I'm grouchy about it, it's been a long week.]

What would make it all tolerable and perhaps even welcome, is if, after a week of meetings (and maybe more meetings, less dinners – hey, it's NYC – get delivery!), if the week ended with some tangible results. To me, it never feels like anything of substance has occurred. They need a mother's voice "No one goes out to play until homework is done!".

Maybe this year will be different. Maybe, along with the collective NYC sigh of relief when they all leave, there will be a feeling of awe and anticipation because of what was accomplished. Maybe there will be hope. ["Oh, Deacon, so naive" – I hear you]

And where do we find God in all this? We can look closely at all that's going on, in this city, this country, the world, and not see any evidence of God. Oh, there's mention, but what evidence? Our institutions will not give us that. The only place we can look, with confidence, for God, is within ourselves and the only way we can be our true people-of-God selves, is when we, like Esther, embrace and disclose who we really are and claim the world as "our people". That's the power we have.

Let's pray for great reversal, dramatic change and yes, a little peace and quiet would be nice.

Deacon Denise

TODAY AFTER CHURCH

Visitors are invited to pick up a welcome bag at the back of the church. All are invited to Coffee Hour in the Parish House after the 11:00 a.m. service. For those interested in a brief tour of the church's art and architecture, please meet one of our volunteer tour guides at the Chapel of the Resurrection near the back of the church.

LAST CALL – JOIN A RENEWAL GROUP!

Beginning TOMORROW, September 30

The Incarnation clergy are creating a five-part video series based on the five vows of the Baptismal Covenant:

1. Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
2. Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
3. Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
4. Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
5. Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

We are in the process of forming lay-led small groups to watch the five videos over five weeks and discuss them. We are currently planning both in-person and Zoom formats at the following dates and times:

- Mondays @ 7:00 p.m. in the home of Anne Tong (located in Murray Hill) beginning Sept. 30
- Mondays @ 7:00 p.m. on Zoom beginning Sept. 30
- Thursdays @ 7:15 p.m. in the Parish House beginning Oct. 3
- Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. in the Parish House beginning Oct. 6

We'll conclude our study just in time for All Saints Sunday, November 3, when we will renew our baptismal vows in church. Email the Rev. Dr. Nate Lee (nlee@churchoftheincarnation.org) if you would like to join a small group.

MINISTRY FAIR

Sunday, October 6, 12:30 to 1:15 p.m. Join us for a Ministry Fair! Come hear from lay leadership about all the ways you can serve Christ at Incarnation. Ministries include:

- Altar Guild
 - Children of Incarcerated Parents Ministry
 - Christmas Fair
 - Church Tour Guides
 - Ecclesia Ministry
 - Hospitality Committee
 - Lay Readers and Chalice Bearers
 - Moravian Open Door Ministry
 - Operation Santa
 - Usher Corps
- Volunteer Choir for Sunday, October 20!

VOLUNTEER CHOIR

Sunday, October 20, at 11:00 a.m. Our music Director, Dr. Thomas Reefer, is inviting parishioners to join the Incarnation Choir on Sunday, October 20, for a first attempt at creating a volunteer choir to sing occasionally alongside our professional singers. There will be one rehearsal on an evening TBD. If you're interested in taking part, please write Thomas a note (treefer@churchoftheincarnation.org) that includes (1) the part you sing, (2) your past choral experience, and (3) your interest in this program (both now and going forward). The ability to read music is desirable, and the ability to sing on pitch is a must.

October 20 is also the day when we introduce our new "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (LEVAS) hymnals. Our music will include plenty of upbeat gospel selections, and we're relying on you to help bring the joy!

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING – HYMNAL DEDICATION

As our organ is being restored, we've expanded our singing repertoire with hymns from the African American and gospel traditions, which the Episcopal Church has gathered together in "Lift Every Voice and Sing II" (LEVAS). We've purchased copies of LEVAS for the pews, and you're invited to dedicate a LEVAS hymnal to honor someone special or a special occasion. The dedication cost is \$25 per hymnal, and there will be a book plate placed on the inside cover to note the dedication as well as the donor.

To donate \$25 and dedicate a hymnal, go to churchoftheincarnation.org/donate and select "Lift Every Voice and Sing" from the dropdown menu. Be sure to type your dedication in the memo line. We'll debut our new LEVAS hymnals in worship on **Sunday, October 20!**

FUNDRAISER FOR INCARNATION CAMP



Tuesday, October 22, at 6:30 p.m. Join us for an evening with Incarnation Camp alum and New York Times columnist **David Brooks**. Light fare and beverages will be served beginning at 5:30 p.m. David's talk, "World on Fire: The Roots of Our Various Crises," will begin at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$125. Scan the QR code to purchase yours!

COMMON CHORD CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

We reached our \$800,000 goal in the Common Chord capital campaign. Now let's shoot for our \$900,000 "stretch" goal!

- Number of pledgers/donors: **118**
- Total amount pledged: **\$811,781**
- Total amount received: **\$500,350**

Will you help keep the momentum going? Pick up a campaign brochure and pledge card at the back of the church or go to givingsites.com/commonchord to learn more.

EVERY WEEK AT INCARNATION

Sunday Bible Study: Bible Study is held in the Parish House from 10:00 to 10:45 a.m. Join us next Sunday for the third in a four-part series on the Babylonian Exile. Led by the Rev. Greg Morgan.

Sunday School and Nursery Care for Children: During the 11:00 a.m. service, children ages 3 to 9 (pre-K through 4th grade) depart the service with their teacher for Sunday School in the Parish House. Nursery care is provided in the Parish House from 10:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Learn more about Family Ministries at Incarnation, including offerings for older children, on the church website.

Wednesday Holy Eucharist: Join us each Wednesday at 12:15 p.m. for this Rite I spoken service of Holy Eucharist, which includes a brief homily and healing prayer with holy oil.

Thursday Candlelight Communion: Join us each Thursday at 6:15 p.m. for Candlelight Communion, a service of Holy Eucharist that incorporates chant and silence as well as elements of contemporary worship. This service is informal and contemplative, with music led by a cantor and a brief reflection by one of the clergy. You can also stream this service at youtube.com/churchoftheincarnation.

Daily Office: Services of Morning Prayer and Compline are held via Zoom. To view the weekly schedule, go to churchoftheincarnation.org/worship.