



Sunday, July 26th

Preacher: Pastor Howard-John Wesley

Sermon Title: Call of Duty Part 2 - "Just Say No"

Scripture: Esther 1:1-12

This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa. The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished. Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas— to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

Sermon Summary:

In this second installment of the Call of Duty sermon series, Pastor Wesley takes us back to the beginning of the book of Esther to look at the story of Vashti. Vashti is summoned by King Xerxes to be presented naked in a room full of drunken men, but she asserts her humanity by refusing to participate. All of us come to moments where we have to speak up for ourselves and just say "no."

You've got to say "no" because life is filled with people who will continuously take advantage of you for their own well being. Vashti's "no" humbles King Xerxes to realize that he has no control over her. She asserts her humanity as a person, not his property. Through the inspiration of this heroic act Pastor Wesley taught us to:

- Be careful of sacrificing your emotional well being to cater to someone else's delusion of power
- Establish boundaries because you can't show everybody everything about you
- Have an awareness of our self worth that will cause us to reject anything that degrades us or devalues us

Through Vashti we are taught to know the importance of our history and to see how that history empowers our own self-esteem. In knowing our self-esteem we realize the full power of our influence. Vashti's influence created a fear in King Xerxes that shook the whole nation. It also inspired other women like Esther to raise her voice. You never know how your own act of saying "no" can change the world.

Life Application Questions:

1. Pastor Wesley taught us that, "you can't show everything to everybody." What boundaries do you have in place for your privacy? How do you determine who's within your circle of trust and is safe to share with?
2. Pastor Wesley declared that "every now and then you ought to reach a Vashti position and speak up for yourself." In what areas of your life is God prompting you to clear your throat and speak up for yourself? When you know that something needs to be said yet you remain silent, what do you think is holding you back?
3. In this sermon we watch Queen Vashti being called to degrade herself and act in a way that wasn't becoming of her position. As you think about your own position as parent, leader, partner, etc., what kinds of requests are you no longer willing to answer?
4. We know from the Esther story that after Queen Vashti says "no," Vashti is removed from her position as queen and disappears from the biblical text. What consequences have you faced from saying no?
5. In this sermon series, we witness two women use their power and position in brave ways to assert their own individual and collective dignity. While we can look to Queen Vashti and Queen Esther (Hadassah) for biblical inspiration, we can also look to women in our present day as models. What woman, whether in your church, family, workplace, or elsewhere inspires you towards excellence and what is it about that woman that does so?
6. Pastor Wesley warned that if we don't know our history we may be ignorant of our past, and dangerous to our future. How can you explore unanswered questions about your past in order to gain more confidence about your future?
7. Queen Vashti says "no" and men become afraid that other women will follow her lead and begin saying "no" to their husbands. While Queen Vashti might have been saying "no" for herself, she has inspired generations of women after her to offer their own no. What is your "no" testimony? What have you said no to that could offer encouragement to someone else in your same scenario.

Spirit Work:

1. Man does not define your value. Psalm 139:14 (NIV) says: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." In your quiet time this week, let the Holy Spirit lead you to the scriptures that define you as the treasure you are to the kingdom.
2. We learned in today's sermon that our history is connected to kings and queens that lived in a land beyond the shores of America. In the same way our spiritual history is connected to those who we read about in the Bible. Take some time this week to meditate on the lives of people in scripture that you believe are linked to your spiritual DNA. Allow the Holy Spirit to use the inspiration that you have gained to encourage and motivate you to help yourself and others in a new and meaningful way.
3. Storytelling is a rich and enduring part of the African American tradition. Pastor Wesley encourages us to think about our collective story in this sermon and stresses its importance for our current understanding of ourselves. Take this week to reach back into your own familial, cultural, or individual story and look for the lessons that might encourage you for these times.