

You can be proud of these 3-5th graders who went to passport! Such good kids. And I learned something new from Amy that I will use with my grandsons before mimi camp next year! Before the trip, Amy put an extra-large drawing paper on the table and the kids all sat down in order to create a covenant of behavior. It was the kids themselves who detailed this covenant ...they were animated & thorough (it was a long list) and they stuck by it! Each night there was a devotional after the evening's event. We all sat on the floor at the end of the hallway and discussed the day – what happened, how did they feel, and discussed the bible story. During Wally's devotional time, he gave 4 little figurines of Jesus to each kid and challenged them to give them away to anyone they saw doing good for someone else. It took courage to do this. It was awkward and uncomfortable, but they were encouraged to be brave.

The theme of passport -as you can tell- was Vamos, let's go. How do we discern where to go, what to do? What is required of us? Esther and her bravery "for such a time as this" was the bible story for my night. I think looking at Esther gives us some clues.

Many of you will remember the story of Esther or maybe not. It's an entire book in the Old Testament that is not preached often but celebrated yearly In March as Purim by the Jewish people. The book of Esther cannot be proven to be historically factual but it does, however, portray the true history of that time. It was the same century when Socrates was born in 470 bc. Confucius was born in the East. It was the "Golden Age" of Greece under Pericles. This was when Athens was at the height of it's' cultural & intellectual influence- The Olympic games existed. Greece had created a political system that became the basis of our democracy. We know a lot about this time from the Greek historian Herodotus who wrote, History of the Persian Wars, 25 years after the reign of Xerxes. It was during this time when Cyrus the King of Persia allowed the Jewish people to return to Judah and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem In fact, Cyrus allowed many people from other countries to return to their homeland. Historians write that while many Jews that went home to Judah, many stayed back in their comfortable lives in Persia. Like Esther...Esther's story is set in Susa, modern Iran, in the court of Ahasuerus, whose Greek name is Xerxes

While God is never mentioned in the whole book, it's a story about God's covenant with us, a story about bravery, deliverance, and being used by God for God's purposes

Esther was raised by her uncle Mordecai after her parents died. Now Xerxes ruled over 127 provinces, had a wife, Queen Vhashti and a right-hand man, Haman who helped him rule. When Queen Vashti refused an order to appear before the King, Xerxes was angry & put out a decree to find the most beautiful woman in each of his provinces. Esther was chosen from her province but kept secret that she was Jewish. Esther pleased the king and she became his favorite. Now Haman made a decree for all the people to bow down to him and Mordecai who hung around the walls of the city

keeping an eye on Esther, would not. Through some other events, it became known that Mordecai was Jewish. So, Haman convinced the king to kill all the Jewish people, in all the provinces, as punishment. But Mordecai had previously saved the king from being killed and the King stepped in and saved Mordecai from this fate. But the decree Still stood!

Mordecai said to Esther “it is up to you to save your people”. By God’s Providence, you have been placed there “for such a time as this”. Now Esther did not want to do this! if you went before the King without being summoned, you would be killed. Esther and the Jewish people in the kingdom, fasted for 3 days and she went before the king. The King welcomed her holding out his gold scepter!! Esther said she wanted to prepare a big banquet for him, (always good to set the stage, create good conditions for the future). And the king was pleased, granting her petition. Everyone was saved! Except Haman

So ...if we’re to “Vamos, Let’s go”, there’s a few things to consider.

1. What providence, the protective care of God, places us in the situations we find ourselves in.?

Colleen Burroughs, who with her husband David created passport 37 years ago, asked me “What are you doing here!” I replied,” well Amy asked me”. I thought it would be fun with Amy & Wally & the kids... and it was! After all, I was a missions pastor & missions coordinator for many years.

Perhaps you are on the ballfield with your kids playing, or at work or having fun with friends. Perhaps your suffering in the past enables you to tune in to someone else suffering. God’s providence, placing you “for such a time as this”, can be anywhere!!

2.Both Mordecai and Esther played a part in the deliverance of the Jews. Many times, we can Help each other, team up- do it together -making a difference in someone’s life.

3. if we set our minds on God each day, asking for an opportunity, God will use us, “Lead me today, Lord”.

We all have busy days, chaotic times...are we rushing through? are we mindful of God’s nudges? Can we hear that inner whisper that encourages us to act?

And what about bravery? Esther could have been killed entering into the King’s inner court without being summoned. Our passport campers, they were brave, handing someone a little Jesus and telling them, “I saw you stop and hold the door for everyone, and I saw you help another kid in Bible study”. It was uncomfortable and scary to do it, but they were so brave! Sometimes, we need to say a quick prayer and just do it!

Often, we don't know how it will all play out. We don't know what God is up to... the significance of it all ...But if we Go, the joy of being used by God makes a difference, in their lives and ours! In everything under the sun, we are assured in Matthew 28:20. "And surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age."

For sure, God is with you, always!