

*Moxie and the Faithful Life*  
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Community Church of Providence  
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Esther 4:6-16

Before I left for vacation last month, as I try to do every couple of months, I prepared my sermon topics for the coming 6 or 8 weeks. For September 8th, I chose the topic of “Moxie as a Theological Concept.” For me, “moxie” describes a certain quality of daring or nerve, some might call it “pluck,” a certain quality that can be an integral part of the life of discipleship. The note which I wrote to myself said:

\*Moxie/nerve  
needed to believe in goodness

The sermon I preached just before I wrote myself that note was about the call of Isaiah and the gift that God gives us as human beings to imagine goodness – to see and hope, even beyond our capacity to accomplish. When we are at our best, instead of being resigned to the practical or saying, “it’s never going to happen,” we allow ourselves to dream of what God might do.

What does it take, I wondered, to look at the problems of the world, and not turn away, to realize their gravity, but still believe in the possibility of goodness, still work for it, still expect that change will come? It takes nerve – it takes a kind of faithful moxie. And we see it throughout scripture.

And then, to my great surprise, on our first day of vacation, we walked into a sandwich shop in Portland, Maine, and I saw this on the counter! A drink named Moxie! I had heard of this many, many years ago, but forgotten about it, not being a New Englander.

I looked into the origin of our English word, moxie, and it comes from this drink, not the other way around. Before this drink was a soda, it was just the syrup, packaged as a medicine, called “Moxie Nerve Food.” It was made from gentian root and was marketed to strengthen the nerves, among many other things. In the 1930’s, after the drink became popular, the word moxie became slang for spunk and nerve and force of character.

Our scripture passage this morning comes from the story of Esther. You may know it well because it is such a captivating story. As the story begins, the queen of the Persian Empire is Vashti – showing some serious nerve, Vashti refused to parade her beauty before the king, and to punish her, the king withdrew her title as queen.

The spot being open, and the king feeling regretful, a call went out across the land to find a beautiful young woman to be the new queen. Esther was a young Jewish woman, raised by her uncle Mordecai, who had come to the country as a captive exile from Jerusalem, and Esther was swept up in the group of young women being evaluated for queenship. Eventually, Esther, never revealing her Jewish identity, was chosen as queen.

Some time later, Esther’s uncle created a stir. In his own display of moxie, Mordecai refused to bow before Haman, one of the king’s officials. Haman, in revenge, obtained

permission from the king to order all of the Jewish people in the land to be killed.

It was then, hearing what was about to happen, that Mordecai called upon Esther, in her privileged position as queen, to protect her people. However, for Esther to approach the king without being called for was an immense risk. If it displeased the king that she had the presumption to invite herself into his presence, legally she could be executed.

Nevertheless, because it was the only chance for her people, Esther risked her life and went into the king's presence to beg his mercy. Thankfully, he received her gladly and listened to her plea, and her people were saved.

What quality did Esther have that enabled her to walk into that throne room? Was it moxie? From the rest of the story, she does not appear to be a particularly audacious person – she seems to be meek and obedient to her uncle – but I think the key to her resolve comes in the request she makes *before* she takes her courageous step: she asks for all of the Jewish people in the city to fast and pray for her for three days. This shows that Esther's act is an act, not just of last resort, but also of faith and trust, as she puts herself in peril to protect her people.

Stepping back, we can see that the story as a whole carries the theme of principled disobedience – first Vashti, then Mordecai, and finally Esther.

Where else in the scriptures do we find “moxie” – in this sense of daring faith – or in that other sense of defiant hope?

- We see Abram leave his home country for a new land.
- Moses and Aaron demand that Pharaoh set their people free.
- Ruth leaves her homeland with her mother-in-law, Naomi, in an act of courageous love.
- Young David faces off against Goliath.
- The widow, Tamar, confronts her father-in-law, Judah.
- Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego walk into a fiery furnace.
- The woman with a jar of expensive oil anoints Jesus, pouring out years' worth of savings, in front of men who despise her.
- Jesus heals people in need on the Sabbath, he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, and later, forgives the soldiers in the middle of his crucifixion.
- Stephen preaches the gospel, although it leads to his stoning.
- The jailer in Acts washes the wounds of his prisoners Paul and Silas and brings them into his home for a meal.
- The fishermen disciples leave their businesses and follow an unknown teacher who stirs their souls.

Why would the disciples walk away from a steady business to follow a wandering teacher? – perhaps because they believed that God could rescue their people, and *that hope was worth the risk*.

This moxie as a way of faithful living bears a quality I want to name that is not only boldness, not just courage, not simply walking out in faith, *but that is a little nervy, a little defiant, a little audacious* in its courage, in its boldness, in its faith – we see it so well in the scrawny David thinking he can slay a giant.

But, the key is, defiant of what? How is this force of character directed that makes it an act of faith? Maybe it is:

- a defiance of the closed door,
- resistance against the unimaginative “no”
- defiance of the insistence that “there is no other way,” whether that insistence comes from despair or pragmatism or legalism.

This faithful moxie hopes against hope and sees beyond sight and believes even through our own unbelief.

It asks, “What matters most?”

It asks, in all seriousness, “Why not?”

It asks, “What is loving?” and “What is just?” not “What makes the most sense?”

It is the opposite of pragmatism because it chooses, not based on likely outcomes of success, but based on *the possibility that something beautiful might be*.

So let us, as we consider every day what it means to be disciples of Jesus, open ourselves to that moxie – that spunk, that audacity – that allows us to follow – even in the face of obstacles – in creative and robust hope and welcome and generosity and in pursuit of a just and loving world.

Amen.