Now you are coming to him as to a living stone. Even though this stone was rejected by humans, from God’s perspective it is chosen, valuable. You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Thus it is written in scripture, Look! I am laying a cornerstone in Zion, chosen, valuable. The person who believes in him will never be shamed.

So God honors you who believe. For those who refuse to believe, though, the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone. This is a stone that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall. Because they refuse to believe in the word, they stumble. Indeed, this is the end to which they were appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal
priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God’s own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. Once you weren’t a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you hadn’t received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**Esther 4:12-17Common English Bible (CEB)**

12 When they told Mordecai Esther’s words, 13 he had them respond to Esther: “Don’t think for one minute that, unlike all the other Jews, you’ll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace. 14 In fact, if you don’t speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows?
Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family.”

15 Esther sent back this word to Mordecai: 16 “Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa and tell them to give up eating to help me be brave. They aren’t to eat or drink anything for three whole days, and I myself will do the same, along with my female servants. Then, even though it’s against the law, I will go to the king; and if I am to die, then die I will.” 17 So Mordecai left where he was and did exactly what Esther had ordered him.
This past Tuesday I had the privilege of meeting with a group of people in the Diocese of Indianapolis so that we could do the work of re-starting our chapter of UBE.

In church years I'm brand new to the diocese— I've been there for three years. I'm still learning the lay of the land. We have one black congregation, with small numbers of black Episcopalians scattered in a few other parishes. Upon my arrival to Indianapolis, there was one black woman deacon, one retired black woman priest, and one other black woman priest.

I missed being in the company of black people. So I asked people at the cathedral about UBE and was told, we haven't had a functioning chapter for years. I figured we needed to do something about this. I spoke with a few members of the Cathedral to help me get it started. But it wasn't a priority.
Once we elected the first black woman diocesan bishop, we knew the time had surely come to resurrect our chapter. How could we have a black bishop and not have a UBE chapter?

I remember very vividly the day we elected her. Leading up to the day of the walkabouts, I had doubts. I knew that she would be the best choice for us, but wondered if we had the nerve to do such a revolutionary thing in such a white diocese and region. Could this be the time when the Holy Spirit would bring about such needed change?

The day we elected Jennifer Baskerville-Burroughs was a stunning confluence of imagination, faith, and risk-taking for a Diocesan community. I was filled with hope and elation.

In a little over a week later, our country had its latest presidential election.
I know that along with me; you felt the devastation of what this outcome has meant for our country and our communities.

And on the day of the election, before we knew the outcome, something in my spirit was uneasy, and I found myself considering the Gospel, social justice and my commitment to Jesus Christ.

What was this time we were entering? I knew that if there was ever a time our church needed to make a difference in this country, it was now. It is for such a time that the church is needed.

One of the things I love about the Episcopal church is our vision of being an inclusive and diverse church. But it's one thing to have a vision. And it's another thing to make that vision a reality.
As a denomination, we've stated the value of the concept of diversity and inclusion, but we have a long way to go when we no longer need discussions, classes, and training on becoming the church we desire to be. I firmly believe that we, that black Episcopalians are a key to our church being the church God calls us to be.

Black people have been in this church since the beginning — enriching it through our struggle for inclusion and recognition, inching ever closer to God's vision for us. This has been a long slow work that our forbearers began, and we continue to this day. However, I think we can make greater progress if we all have a greater sense of our purpose, our value and our mission in this church and in the world.
It is for such a time as this that we have been called to be the workers of reconciliation and justice in our church and this world.

Consider the story of Esther. She was living a good and comfortable life when she unexpectedly found herself in a position to help her people, to save them from being killed.

She was reluctant to approach the king on behalf of her people because she wasn't supposed to speak to him unless he summoned her. But her uncle reminded her of her responsibility to her people.

If you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”
Esther's actions weren't subject to the censure of "that's the way it's always been done."
She felt the urgency and weight of the responsibility and the risk. Her actions were not just about her, her comfort or her efforts. She knew that her single effort must be fortified by the entire community.

Some might say that our work in the church isn't a matter of life or death.
But I don't know about that.
The Episcopal church is a relatively liberal denomination, that is predominantly white. The issues and concerns of black folk are not the personal concerns of most of her members. In our current political climate, we have a responsibility to address the concerns of marginalized people. Unlike Mordecai's hope, in our case, relief and deliverance will not rise from another quarter.
It is for such a time as this that we have been called to come together for justice. As black people in this church, we must be leaders in justice work.

As we address today's issues of injustice, we must first make sure that our actions aren't subject to the censure of that's the way it's always been done. We must heed the urgency and weight of our responsibility. We must remember that our actions are not just about our individual comfort or our individual efforts. Our efforts must be fortified by the entire community if we are to be faithful to our call.

It is for such a time as this that we must encourage and allow our young people to lead us. It is for such a time as this that we eliminate we've never done it this way from our vocabulary.
It is for such a time as this that we recognize the
necessity of participation in the spiritual practices of
fasting, study, and prayer as a community.
It is for such a time as this that we go out of our way to
be involved in advocacy and service work that
addresses the uplift of the vulnerable and forgotten
people in our society.
It is for such a time as this that we must take a stand
especially because we could keep silent.
Yes, it will be risky. Yes, it seems that the work before
us is never-ending.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy
nation, a people who are God’s own possession. You
have become this people so that you may speak of the
wonderful acts of the one who called you.
Our work in our communities is a witness to the larger church. An additional piece of our work as followers of Jesus is to be vigilant and focused on leading our church towards our common vision of beloved community. The more we commit to this work, the more we will face challenges to this commitment. In our congregations, we may face opposition because justice work takes people out of their comfort zone.

You may find yourself speaking up in a diocesan meeting or convention, saying things that disturb your white allies, but things that are needed to be said none the less.

Justice work will not always make you popular.

Some will say to you,

“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

But take heart.
The religious leaders questioned Jesus' authority because, in the passages before, he healed people and turned over the tables in the temple. His ministry was a challenge to their institution and the little power they held in an occupied state. They were disturbed by the ministry of John the Baptist and even more so by his connection to Jesus. They didn't want to lose their status and power by approving of anyone whose commitment to justice would not stay within the confines of society and the institutions that prescribed who was in and who was out.

“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

These two questions are a great tool for discernment for us today. They help us to be clear about our work and mission in the world.
In our Gospel, Jesus points out the uselessness of worldly esteem if it stops us from being faithful to God. The ones who get it right, who don't mind being foolish for the Gospel are the ones whom society has cast aside and has no use for the marginalized.

Jesus' message of love gave outsiders the courage to make choices that freed them from the constraints of a society based on scarcity and division.

It is for such a time as this that each of you has been called to carry on the work of our forbearers. I know I said that we need to abolish talking about doing things the way it has been done in the past. I want to modify that. It is good to reference the courage of our ancestors and to honor them by replicating their courage. The things that they did for the sake of freedom and justice are to be admired.
Remember that commercial? What would you do for a Klondike bar? People would cluck like a chicken - one version a man would sing the little teapot song gestures and all a goofy, cheesy commercial, but seriously, these questions about the authority in our Gospel today are questions that ask us to consider what we would do for the sake of the Gospel.

What would you do for peace, reconciliation, an end to poverty, an end to mass incarceration, an end to police brutality, an end to white supremacy to have a world of inclusion where we accept, love and celebrate our diversity?

It is a good thing when what we do because of our faith stirs up questions in others. It is for such a time as this
that we have been called to act boldly and with authority. Our authority comes with our baptism, and Jesus gives it to us. It is ours to use. We need no further permission.