

19<sup>th</sup> April 2023

## Courage

**“Develop enough courage so that you can stand up for yourself,  
and then stand up for somebody else.”**

Maya Angelou, *Rainbow in the Cloud* (2014)

The story of Esther begins with a grand banquet at the palace of Xerxes, king of Persia. The king is drunk and commands his wife, Queen Vashti, to come to show how beautiful she is. Vashti refuses to be paraded, and Xerxes is so angry that he divorces her on the spot and calls for a nationwide beauty pageant to be held to find him a new queen. Esther, a Jewish woman, is taken with other young women to a citadel. Her cousin, Mordecai, had raised her as his own after Esther's parents had died. Her beauty wins the day, and she becomes queen, but she is careful not to tell anyone her nationality, as Mordecai had warned her not to.

One night, Mordecai is sitting by the king's gate, and overhears two guards conspiring to assassinate the king. Mordecai tells Esther, and Esther tells the king, giving credit to Mordecai for overhearing the plan. Mordecai is a hero, but refuses to be subjugated by Haman, the king's top noble. Haman finds out about this, *and* that Mordecai is a Jew, flies into a rage and threatens to kill Mordecai and all the Jewish nation. He convinces the king of this, and the king sets a date for all Jews to be killed.

When Esther discovers this, she responds by instructing all Jews to join her in fasting for three days and nights, before she approaches the king to ask, at a great banquet, that she and her people be spared. Despite the threat to her own life, she makes a public plea for her people. It all turns out well in the end – though not for Haman, sadly! Esther and Mordecai are honoured, and a decree was written to protect all Jews.

It's like something from the time of the Roman Caesars or Henry VIII. Yet Esther's story is a powerful one for me. This woman reminds me of two important women in my life – my mother and my granny. She sees beyond her own needs, comfort and security, to be a voice for the voiceless, to “stand up for someone else”, in Maya Angelou's words. She has courage to do what is right – *and* in a man's world – no matter what.

I salute Esther today. I pray that I can show the influence that this, and other important women in my life, have had on me.

### **A prayer for today**

*Courage – to do what is right, no matter what. Yes, that's what I need. Amen*