

Power and protest – saving others, and ourselves

Numbers (*Bemidbar*) 17: 8-13

וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל־פְּנֵי אֱהֱל מוֹעֵד: וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: הֲרָמוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאָכְלָה אֹתָם כָּרְגֵעַ וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן קַח אֶת־הַמִּחָתָה וְתַרְעֲלֶיהָ אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשִׁים קִטְרֶת וְהוֹלֵךְ מִהֵרָה אֶל־הָעֵדָה וְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם כִּי־יֵצֵא הַקָּצֹף מִלִּפְנֵי ה' הַחֹל הַנֶּגֶף: וַיִּקַּח אֱהֱרֹן כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּרָץ אֶל־תּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל וְהִנֵּה הַחֹל הַנֶּגֶף בָּעָם וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַקִּטְרֶת וַיִּכַּפֵּר עֲלֵהֶם: וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין־הַמֵּתִים וּבֵין הַחַיִּים וַתֵּעָצֵר הַמִּגֶּפֶה:

When Moses and Aaron reached the Tent of Meeting, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Remove yourselves from the community, that I may annihilate them in an instant." They fell upon their faces. Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take the fire pan, and put on it fire from the altar. Add incense and take it quickly to the community and make atonement for them. For fury has gone forth from the LORD; the plague has begun!" Aaron took it, as Moses had ordered, and ran to the midst of the congregation, where the plague had begun among the people; he stood between the dead and the living until the plague stopped.

Book (*Megillah*) of Esther 4: 13-17

וַיֹּאמֶר מָרְדֳּכָי לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־אַסְתֵּר אֶל־תְּדַמִּי בְּנִפְשִׁי לְהַמְלִיט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים. כִּי אִם־הִחְרַשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי בָּעֵת הַזֹּאת רִחוּ וְהִצֵּלָה יַעֲמֹד לַיְּהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאַתָּה וּבֵית־אֲבִיךָ תִּאָּבְדוּ וְיָמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לָעֵת כְּזֹאת הִגַּעַת לְמַלְכוּת. וַתֹּאמֶר אַסְתֵּר לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־מָרְדֳּכָי. לֹךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאֶל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶל־תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לִלְלָה וַיֹּסֶם אֲנִי וְנַעֲרָתַי אֲצוּם כֹּן וּבָכֹן אֲבֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־כֹדֶת, וְכַאֲשֶׁר אֲבִדְתִּי אֲבִדְתִּי. וַיַּעֲבֵר מָרְדֳּכָי וַיַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוְּתָה עָלָיו אַסְתֵּר.

Mordechai had this message delivered to Esther: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis." Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordechai: "Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf: do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!" So Mordechai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Thinking about these two stories:

1. Who are Aaron and Esther saving?
2. What danger would Aaron and Esther be in if they'd done nothing?
3. Why do Aaron and Esther decide to do what they do?
4. What personal risks do Aaron and Esther take?
5. What lessons do you think the text wants to teach us?



Your silence will not save you

Audre Lorde (1934-92) was an American writer, feminist, radical feminist, womanist, librarian, and civil rights activist. She was a self-described "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet," who "dedicated both her life and her creative talent to confronting and addressing injustices of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia."

Questions for us to think about:

1. What did Audre Lorde mean?
2. Why might this have been relevant to her, in her life?
3. What do you think this means for you?