"For Such a Time as That"
October 18, 2026

Esther 4:12-17

Lois Foster Watson, one of the matriarchs in the Foster Family and one of the saints of this congregation, wrote a book in 1992 detailing the history of Wapping Community Church. Entitled, "Wapping Five Corners," the book is seventy-five pages long and filled with anecdotes and information about this church and the people who shaped this church's life down through the generations.

According to Lois Watson, way back in the year 1760, there were thirty-eight families and around two hundred and fifty individuals living in this local area. Back then, this part of town was known as "Wapping"…hence the name of this church. And Wapping, in turn, likely derived its name from a street in London which bore the same designation.

In any case, in 1760 those thirty-eight families were finally granted permission by the state legislature to build a place for worship. A ruling which proved to be especially important to the petitioners when the weather turned cold because it meant they didn't have to trek all the way across town to worship at First Congregational Church on Old Main Street.

To get from Wapping Community Church to First Congregational Church today, you could jump in your car and it would take less than ten minutes to cover the four-mile distance. Back in 1760, there were no roads and no cars. I suspect there were mostly woods between here and there, punctuated by a few open fields. To travel the route on horseback or in a wagon would have taken considerably longer than ten minutes. To walk from this part of town to First Congregational Church probably would have taken well over an hour each way…if the weather cooperated and you were in good shape.

Five years later after the state of Connecticut agreed, around 1765, people on this side of town built a wooden meeting house. It wasn't a particularly sturdy structure. And it didn't prove to be very durable either. In fact, not much time passed before the people in Wapping realized they couldn't worship in their meeting house during the five coldest months in the year. No wood stove and no amount of layered clothing could keep a worshipper comfortable from the beginning of a long winter church service to the end.

Finally, in 1799, thirty-four years after the relatively crude meeting house was constructed near the site of this sanctuary, what had come to be known as "the Wapping Barn" reached an inglorious end. According to Lois Watson, some teenage boys were out on a "frolic" when they decided to pull the barn down to the ground. As near as I can imagine, a frolic was a night where a teenage prank went wrong. At the same time, maybe pulling down the Wapping Barn qualified as good entertainment for a group of teenage boys searching for something to do one night two hundred and twenty-five years ago.

Faced with the sudden realization that there was once again no place where the people of Wapping could worship on this side of town, our ancestors rolled up their sleeves. They raised money. They accumulated materials. And eventually, they began to rebuild. In fact, some of the wooden beams located above the ceiling or hidden behind walls in this sanctuary might be two hundred and twenty-five years old.

By 1801, the people of Wapping had built the basic church structure. By 1802, they covered this church building with a roof and they glazed the windows around the sanctuary to keep them in place and to help withstand the weather. Back then, this was a no-frills sanctuary. Never mind cushioned pews, people sat on hard slabs of wood for worship services. And every Sunday, they used a clean pillow case to cover the Bible so it would be presentable for reading during worship the following week.

Those thirty-eight original Wapping families were nothing if not resourceful. And patient. And hard working. And visionary. Together they persevered and founded the church where you and I now gather every Sunday. If our forefathers and foremothers from 1802 were here among us this morning, they might look around at this church building and be astounded by how much has changed in two plus centuries. At the same time, I hope they would be able to recognize some of the faithful seeds they planted all the way back in 1802 and how those seeds have taken root and borne fruit in this congregation over many generations.

Looking back, we owe a debt of gratitude to each of those hearty two hundred and fifty Wapping residents who lived here in the late 1700's. And maybe even to that group of teenage boys whose rowdy exploits while out on a nighttime frolic look much more amusing with the benefit of historical hindsight. Plus look around at this beautiful church building which rose back to life out of the pile of wood they left behind…

In this morning's Scripture lesson, Esther was one of the King Haman's wives, but the law in those days forbade her from speaking directly to the king about matters of political importance. This despite the fact that King Haman planned to destroy all of Queen Esther's Jewish people. And Queen Esther, warned of the king's evil plot before it happened, was well aware of what was at stake.

All of which left Esther in a quandary. Raising her voice in the king's presence against the oppression of her people was a dangerous idea. But Esther's uncle, Mordecai, challenged Esther with the words from today's scripture. Perhaps you are who you are and where you are for such a time as this, Mordecai said. Which was just the encouragement Esther needed to save her fellow Jews from destruction at the king's hand. Thank God Esther acted so boldly in the end.

The Biblical story of Esther reminds us of a few things. Sometimes God purposefully positions believers like Queen Esther in specific families, workplaces, schools, and communities not by accident, but for a mission. Second, God often asks

those who trust God to choose courage over comfort: Obeying God sometimes requires stepping out of personal safety or convenience into uncertain or risky circumstances.

Third, God asks you and me to take action in the present. Rather than waiting for ideal conditions or complaining about various obstacles, believers are called to be faithful "in the now". Finally, God wants us to call on the power of the community. Esther did not act alone long ago. She called the Jewish community in Susa to fast and pray for three days straight before she even took it upon herself to approach the king.

Sometimes, like Queen Esther, we find ourselves in positions of influence where we can make a dramatic impact in a particular situation. Other times God uses us just where we are, welcoming whatever gifts we have to offer, both big and small. Either way, God so often puts you and me where we are for such a time as this.

Back in 1802, the residents of Wapping, though few in number, looked at the meeting house they worshipped in, reduced to a pile of lumber. They could have thrown up their hands in despair and disgust and walked away. They could have recommitted themselves to traveling clear across town to First Congregational Church the way they had once done every week.

What did they do instead? Those thirty-eight families looked at each other. And they looked at the challenge in front of them. And they said to one another, “maybe God wants us to build a new church right here on this same piece of land. A place where we can gather for worship every week. A place where we can sing and pray and learn and read the Bible and draw strength from God and from each other.

They discussed it back and forth. Maybe God has put us in this position, in this location, with a particular mission in mind. Perhaps God is asking us to be courageous, even though it would be easier and more convenient to forget about a new church and go back to our old routines. Maybe God wants us to do something right now, instead of waiting until someday down the road when it might be easier to build the church we want. Perhaps God wants us to come together in community knowing that if all of us join hands and work together, we can accomplish anything.

What if God is calling us to build a church “for such a time as this”, they said to each other. Which is just what our ancestors in faith did. They decided it was their time. They decided this was the place. And they began to build the church we are sitting in right this very moment…

Well, that was that. And that was then. But two hundred and twenty-five years later, our congregational mission remains unchanged. Our impulse to worship God and sing and pray and learn and read the Bible and draw strength from each other in this beloved community is every bit as strong in 2026 as it was back in 1801.

Similarly, the challenges remain. How to maintain this building well so that our faith community and so many other groups from the greater South Windsor community can count on its availability and durability. How to be courageous and visionary and hope-filled in a world filled with brokenness and polarization and violence and despair. How we continue to come together as God's people rather, trusting that we can accomplish more in community than any one of us can on our own.

Back in 1801 and 1802, our forebears decided it was such a time for them. In 2026 and 2027, you and I have a chance to decide it is such a time for us. Offering our hard work and our perseverance and our financial resources and our prayers and our courage and resolve. So that God's mighty work will continue in us and through us here in this Wapping section of South Windsor, Connecticut. Amen.