"For Such a Time as Then"
November 1, 2026

Esther 4:12-17

I read a story this past week about a man in Albany, New York, who recently retired after a long career as a journalist. Like most recent retirees the man was thinking about a number of questions related to his future. "What am I gonna do next? Who am I now that I'm not going to work every day? How do I plan to spend my time?

As he was thinking about these questions, the man's wife informed him he should start his retirement by cleaning out the garage. Which he did. He walked down into his garage…a place that no one had really touched for a number of years. And he started moving some things around and dusting some other things off. At some point along the way, he found a little metal tin which he did not recognize. So he dusted off the top of the tin and saw that the lid had a nice design.

The man proceeded to open the tin and he saw a few small envelopes inside. One by one he opened up the little envelopes and in each of the envelopes were a bunch of small seeds. "That's kind of strange", the man thought to himself. Then he looked down into the bottom of the tin again and he saw a letter.

The letter had a three cents stamp on it, and it was postmarked from May of 1940. When the man opened the letter, he began to read and he soon realized it was a letter that was written and sent to the original owners of the home. As the man read the letter, he figured out that the letter came from someone the homeowners knew who had engaged the homeowners in a conversation about hibiscus.

As a result of that conversation, whoever talked to the homeowners wound up sending the homeowners a number of hibiscus seeds. Seeds the homeowner had never planted. Since they were still in the original envelopes, maybe the homeowners forgot they received the hibiscus seeds in the first place.

In any case, the newly retired man looked over these seeds and thought to himself, "These seeds are over eighty years old. I wonder if there's a chance they will still grow." So he took all the seeds, picked out a spot in his yard, and planted them in the ground. Then he waited. A week, two weeks, three weeks and nothing happened.

Whereupon the man started to ask a few of his friends and neighbors who he figured might know about such things. And one after another, they all gave the retired man the same answer. "I'm not really sure. You said those seeds are eighty years old, right. I don't know if they're ever gonna grow." Even the most optimistic opinions had a caveat. "I guess it's possible they will grow, but I wouldn't count on it."

The retired man went back to the letter and read it again. And right near the end of the letter there was a recommendation. Kind of like a "PS." It said, "hey, be patient.

These are hibiscus seeds. It takes them a little while." So the man took the letter writers advice and stopped paying close attention to the seeds he planted.

Until a few months later when the man went out and noticed little sprouts shooting up through the ground. All of which led him to reflect a bit. Here I am a guy who just stopped working after a long career and I wasn't sure what I was going to do with myself. So I cleaned out my garage. Then I found some really old seeds. I planted them in the ground to see what would happen and I sorta forgot about them. Until finally, to my surprise, they began to grow.

Actually, the man figured, the whole thing gave me hope. Because I thought to myself, if these old seeds can still grow, maybe this old retiree can still grow too. I guess I just have to follow the advice at the end of that letter. Be patient and wait for a little while…

Two weeks ago, I preached my first sermon on this morning's Scripture passage from the Book of Esther. It was titled, "For Such a Time as That" and it flashed back to the earliest days of Wapping Community Church. All the way back to the year 1799 when a group of teenage boys pulled a makeshift worship structure called the "Wapping Barn" to the ground and all the faithful people on this side of town had a decision to make.

For the next couple of years, the thirty-eight families of Wapping who lived in this neighborhood raised money, pooled their resources and rolled up their sleeves. And in 1802 they finished building the sanctuary we sit in this morning. Thank God those early Wapping Christians responded the way they did for such a time as that. Their generosity, their hard work, their devotion and their vision planted the seeds of Wapping Community Church right in this spot two hundred and twenty-five years ago.

Last week I preached my second sermon on this morning's Scripture lesson. Titled, "For Such a Time as This", it was a sermon about the power of community. Just like Queen Esther's community long ago, who fasted and prayed in order to give Esther the strength she needed to confront the king and save her Jewish people, this community of faith comes together every week to find the strength we need to live through our days. To pray for people and places in need. To confront the injustices in our time. To spread love and compassion to people who gather inside these walls and people who live outside these walls. And to always bear in mind that we can accomplish more good as a congregation than we can as individuals.

This morning, we look into the future of Wapping Community Church with a sermon titled, "For Such a Time as Then." And this morning's sermon comes with a promise. We will be reading a different Scripture lesson next Sunday. As much as I like Queen Esther, it's time to move on.

Today I want to talk about seeds. The kind of seeds you find and you plant, not knowing when they will grow or if they will grow at all. And I want to focus on the two

words Mordecai said to his cousin Esther before he asked her whether she had been put in the royal palace for the purpose of saving her Jewish brothers and sisters.

Listen again to what Mordecai said. "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." As much as Mordecai hoped that Esther would risk approaching the king to convince him to change his mind, in the end, he knew there was no guarantee. The best Mordecai could do was plant the seed and hope Queen Esther took it upon herself to make sure the seed bore fruit.

Who knows? Who knows how and when and where the seeds we plant in our lives will grow? The same holds true here at Wapping Community Church. Sometimes we plant seeds and we see them come to life immediately in the form of food that will soon wind up on someone's table. Or clothing that will wind up in short order on someone's body. Or a prayer that will offer instant comfort and strength to someone who is grieving or struggling or trying to heal.

Other times, there are seeds we plant here at Wapping Community Church, and we don't have any idea how they will take root and grow. When we baptize a baby in the name of Jesus Christ, we don't know exactly how God's anointing and God's blessing will play out in that child's life as they grow up. When we watch someone from our Church School play a part in the Christmas pageant, we never know whether they will look back on that moment years later and describe their experience as a pivotal moment in their own faith journey.

Could it be that one of the youth in our church preaches a sermon on Youth Sunday and someday responds to a call from God to go into ministry because they first heard God whispering to them while they were standing in this Wapping church pulpit? Or maybe there's an adult in our congregation who receives a cancer diagnosis with a long, prescribed set of chemo and radiation treatments that stretch out for months. And this congregation prays every Sunday until finally the treatment comes to an end and the doctor informs the person they are in remission. Which causes the person in remission to look back to their diagnosis and identify the prayers of this congregation as part of what made the difference in the healing process.

To be sure, you and I give generously to Wapping Community Church because we can quickly and easily see the gifts we give and the impact those gifts make in the lives of people we know and people we have never met. At the same time, you and I give generously to Wapping Community Church because we are in the seed planting business. And we don't always know how some of the seeds we plant will grow some day in the future.

In the midst of this season when you and I think carefully and prayerfully and intentionally about how we can support the ministries and the missions of this congregation, we think about three things. We think about our ancestors in faith and the seeds they planted here in Wapping two hundred and twenty-five years ago. We think about 2026 and 2027 and the seeds we will watch grow as a congregation over the next

year. We also think about the future of Wapping Community Church and what may take root and grow one day down the road.

Yes today, especially, we recall the words of Mordecai when he spoke to Esther long ago. Who knows? With a little patience, who knows what the gifts we give today could mean for such a time as then? Amen.