

2005 Cumberland Presbyterian Women's Ministry Convention
Theme: For Such A Time As This: Reaching Out to Serve
Symbol: Crown and Scepter

Esther 4:14

"...Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the kingdom for just such a time as this."

Matthew 25:34-40.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Theme Hymn: *Take My Life and Let It Be*

Theme Songs: *Here I Am, Lord*

The story of Esther is a complex account of intrigue, excess, power and control as well as one of courage, wisdom, intellect, faithfulness, commitment and service. The multi-layered story has much to teach us today. Esther was a woman living on the margins of society. She was the marginalized of the marginalized! First of all, Esther was a Jewish refugee living in Persia following capture of her people by the Babylonians (between 597-587 B.C.E.) Not only was she a Jewish refugee but she had to endure further indignation and abuse by being forced into the king's harem. Secondly and probably more importantly, Esther was a woman, having no power or voice in her culture. What is amazing is that God used her willingness and courage to save an entire race of people. Through her wisdom, thought, and planning Esther worked within the system to make a difference in the lives of her people.

Esther did not choose her life circumstances, but she allowed Yahweh to use her life circumstances to serve others. When she tried to offer her excuses to Mordecai, he simply reminded her of the experiences in her life that had brought her to the right time and the right place in order to be used by Yahweh! He challenged her to make her suffering count for something positive. While she was probably "shaking in her sandals," Esther confidently reached out to serve her people with wisdom and courage. We are challenged to do no less than the same today.

Folks live very complex lives today; maybe not as extreme as Esther, but certainly challenging lives --- we are over-scheduled, too old, too young, we may still have young children at home, or we've just retired, or finally have that empty nest, there's not enough money in the bank, or our job is too stressful, we may be suffering some health problems, or the world situation has us concerned along with the constant threat of terrorism. We can always find numerous "good excuses" not to reach out to serve others. But we are called to a "more excellent way." We are called to reach out in love and kindness to others. God's people are suffering all around us.... the homeless person, abused women and children, the hungry in body and soul, the marginalized refugee or immigrant, the schoolchildren in Russia, Iraq, or across the proverbial "railroad tracks." Jesus reminds us of the "least of these" in Matthew 25. Like Esther of the Old Testament, we serve God as we reach out to serve and minister to others. What will be our answer when God says to us, "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the kingdom (or this place in your life) *for such a time as this!*" **Reach out to Serve.**