



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year A – 6 Epiphany, King Kamehameha IV – February 12, 2017

The Reverend Canon R. K. “Moki” Hino

I'm very touched that we're honoring King Kamehameha IV this morning. He lived a short life, and because he died at the young age of 29, I think that a lot of what he did is overlooked, especially after all the wonderful things that his consort Queen Emma did for the people of Hawai'i in the 20 years of her widowed life, without His Majesty at her side.

Last summer, a parishioner from Hilo and I spent four months working on a project to record people's thoughts and feelings about Kamehameha IV and Queen Emma's legacy to the people of Hawai'i, and in particular, members of The Episcopal Church. We traveled to all the major Hawaiian Islands and listened and learned.

One of the things that I learned was that Kamehameha IV was full of life. He made the most of the 29 years that he was with us. And last summer I also had the occasion to read the journal of the travels he took with his brother to the United States, England and France. They were both high school age, teenagers, and accompanied by Dr. Judd.

And while reading the journal I was pleased by the tidbits where I read that poor Dr. Judd was frequently frustrated with the two boys because they were constantly sneaking out and having a good time, escaping Dr. Judd's very watchful eye. And I took delight in that, because it gave me a glimpse into the King's humanity. He liked to go out and have fun, just like I did when I was his age. And he contributed to the consternation of the adults in his midst, just like I did when I was his age.

And Kamehameha IV was, evidently, quite a dashing figure. I admit that I smiled with delight when I read an account of how full his dance card was at a cotillion in California where the young ladies swooned and scrambled for an opportunity to twirl around the ballroom floor with the young and handsome man who was then a Hawaiian prince.

In the course of my talking with different people in the Hawaiian Islands about the Holy Sovereigns, I also learned that Kamehameha IV was a man who was full of fire, and that that fire often came in the form of a formidable temper. But the thing that strikes me about that is that the outbursts were almost always followed by intense remorse; not justification, but remorse. And that remorse was followed always by some kind of act or deed that showed that His Majesty knew what the right thing was to do. And that takes humility.

And then, of course, there's the King's writing. He was a well-educated man who came up with beautiful descriptions when he put pen to paper and the way he wrote shows not only that he had education, but that he also had a sense of style along with a good deal of class. His writings also show the intense love he had for his wife. They were, as one of you described last summer, “star-crossed lovers,” who had deep affection for one another.

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And I think the greatest tragedy in this story is that the King died so young. When I think of what more he might have accomplished had he lived longer, it overwhelms my imagination because he already did so much in just 29 short years of life. And in that sense, I think Kamehameha IV embodies the line from Deuteronomy this morning, the line that says, “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him.”

Kamehameha IV may have lost his young son, but I don't think he lost his descendants, because in many ways his descendants are you and me, the people sitting in this Cathedral this morning, the Cathedral that he and his wife built so that you and I would have a place to worship over a hundred fifty years later and over a hundred fifty years into a story that continues to live even though his body rests in the ground at the Royal Mausoleum at Mauna 'Ala in Nu'uanu.

Mauna 'Ala is an incredibly spiritual place, and I'm told that its Hawaiian name translates into “Fragrant Mountain.” And every time I go up there, for whatever occasion I've been invited, I always think of Kamehameha IV and the chant that was written in his honor. The beginning line of the chant says:

*Ua nani 'o Nu'uanu  
I ka lau o ke kāwelu*

*Beautiful is Nu'uanu  
With the kāwelu grass*

I'm told that the kāwelu is a grass that can grow at sea level as well as at high elevations. It grows in close clumps of tall and slender stalks that sway like a dancer when the wind blows. It can also withstand droughts and salt spray. So, I can see why this grass, the kāwelu, is attributed to Kamehameha IV in chant and song. It grows where it will—at sea level, in the mountains, on Hawai'i Island, on Nehoa, Laysan, and Ni'ihau, no doubt all places that were touched by the life and presence of Kamehameha IV. And the kāwelu can withstand adversity—the wind, the droughts, and the salt spray. King Kamehameha IV did the same—losing a son, dealing with a temper, but in all of it turning to the God he worshipped and the God he loved.

There are times when I've stood on the grounds at Mauna 'Ala and on the light breeze, I swear I've taken in the soft fragrance of that grass, its scent somehow wafting down from the mountains to remind me of the King, assuring me that his presence is still with us, still with us in the legacy of our Cathedral and still with us in the essence of the soft, sweet fragrance of the kāwelu that wafts its way to us in the gentle Hawaiian wind.

In his Preface to the Hawaiian Book of Common Prayer, His Majesty writes this:

*The Church has not left us to go by one step from darkness into the awful presence and brightness of God, but it has prepared for our use prayers to meet the necessities of every soul, whether they be used in public or in private.*

He goes on:

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*There are branches of this Church in every land. How the Church has come down from the times of the Apostles to these days in which we live is not a matter about which the generality of men are ignorant. It were useless perhaps to set forth how she has taken root sooner or later all over the world. She is planted in America, in Asia, in Europe, in Africa, in the islands which stud the ocean, and now, behold! she is here with us in these islands of our own.*

*Let us see how she felt her way and reached us at last.*

Thus writes His Majesty King Kamehameha IV in beautiful, elegant prose.

The Church felt her way and reached us at last. King Kamehameha IV did the same for us, planted, like the *kāwelu*, in our island stories and in our island souls. He felt his way and reached us at last—and through the ages and into eternity. And for that we can all say with truly grateful hearts, “Thanks be to God.”

Let us pray:

*Most Holy and gracious God, we give thanks for the life and witness of King Kamehameha IV, for his love of life, for his eloquence and steadfastness in bringing people into the fullness of your presence, for his love of family, for his love of people, for his love of the land, and for his love of God. We commend his soul to your ever-loving care, where with you and the Holy Spirit, he may rest in peace and rise to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*