



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

**Sermon: Year A – Seventh Sunday in Easter, May 28, 2017**

**The Reverend Canon R. K. “Moki” Hino,**

When I was a second grader I lived in Saginaw, Michigan. And if you ask me what I remember about Saginaw, of course I remember the snow, and my teachers, and stuff like that. But the thing I really remember is how my mom used to play Elton John albums on our record player. And I really “Rocket Man” where Sir Elton sang this:

*I think it's gonna be a long long time  
Till touch down brings me round again to find  
I'm not the man they think I am at home  
Oh no no no I'm a rocket man  
Rocket man burning out his fuse up here alone*

That’s one of the things I remember about life as a little kid in Saginaw, Michigan—Elton John and Rocket Man.

And it all came back to me when signed up for a four-year course called EFM (Education for Ministry) several years ago. And I remember one night when we did a theological reflection on the Ascension and I got stuck on what it actually, physically looked like. “Did Jesus just disappear?” I asked. “Or did he rise slowly into the sky?”

Finally, one of the exasperated members of the group looked at me and said, “Well, it’s not like Jesus was Rocket Man, you know.”

*I'm a rocket man, burning out his fuse up here alone*

Needless to say, the EFM group wasn’t much help! And as I hear the passage again from today’s gospel, I realize that it isn’t so much about how Jesus ascended. It’s more about what he left behind. Listen to the words of Peter:

*Humble yourselves  
Cast all your anxiety on him  
Discipline yourselves, keep alert.  
The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support,  
strengthen, and establish you.*

Eternal glory in Christ. That’s what we’re left with. Restore. Support. Strengthen. Establish. Who cares how he ascended. I care more about what he left behind. And it’s something I want to embrace for myself.

## Easter 7 – May 28, 2017, cont'd

*And I think it's gonna be a long long time  
Till touch down brings me round again to find  
I'm not the man they think I am at home*

But it's not gonna be a long long time. And Jesus is the man we think he is, the savior we know he is. And he's not up there alone; he's with us right here, right now, all the time.

The trick is: how do we stay in touch with that presence?

Think about the things we get bogged down with –fear, insecurity, the need for material goods, lust for power, hunger for money. And the godless world tells us we need all that; and we see ads with people with beautiful clothes and perfect bodies, driving sleek and sexy cars. The godless world tells us we need all that stuff, and then we hear this again:

*Humble yourselves*

*Cast all your anxiety on him*

*Discipline yourselves, keep alert.*

*The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.*

Maybe the fear, the insecurity, the need for material goods, the lust for power, the hunger for money in the godless world, maybe all that stuff keeps us from feeling the presence of Christ and we become part of the godless world too. I don't want that for any of us. For us, for everyone, I want the world of God. I want the presence of Christ. And the little boy in me says, "I want Rocket Man!"

I've been thinking a lot about that kind of thing since I've been back in Honolulu. I still can't believe it, and sometimes I have to pinch myself when I walk on the cathedral square, or in the sanctuary itself and feel the presence, as one of you said, of every single person who ever prayed here.

And in order to notice that kind of thing, I have to empty myself, including my wallet, and so I tithe.

The Offertory, after all, is a time in the Eucharistic Prayer where we empty ourselves and offer our lives and our labor back to the God we worship and the God we love. And money takes on a sacramental value—it's the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace of our sweat equity, a symbol of our lives, a symbol of our lives that we offer up.

And I feel the presence of Christ; not Rocket Man burning out his fuse up there alone, but Jesus Christ present in the bread and the wine and on the countenance of the faces I see in the pews, at the altar rail, on the street, and in the world. When I empty myself, I have the gift of being able to notice those things and that's well worth the price of giving back to the One who makes it all possible.

## Easter 7 – May 28, 2017, cont'd

And this reminds me of another story, a story about a woman in a movie I saw several years ago at the Palace Theater in Hilo about the life and work of Auntie Nona Beamer. In the movie, one of her students (a *kumu hula* on Kauai) talks about how Auntie Nona took him with her into the forest at night and told him to listen. “Listen for what?” he demanded. “Just listen,” she said.

And pretty soon he heard the kahuli, the singing snail. Yes, Hawaiian tradition says that the kahuli sing. When the kumu hula got quiet and still and empty, he heard the kahuli making night music as they dragged their shells across the bark of the trees in the forest.

And as I listened to that story, it struck me: Auntie Nona and her student were in the kingdom of God and the presence of Christ; because they were willing to become empty, get rid of the distractions, and let the beauty of creation and the holiness around them into their hearts.

And we can do the same thing. We can become empty enough to let God in – with our giving, with our prayers, with our sacraments, with our lives, and with the belief in the truth that God is ready and waiting to be let in and that God will come into our hearts and into our lives because we are worthy, we are valued, we are loved, and we are saved. That’s the truth to which we’re consecrated in the Eucharist, God’s truth that God longs to share with us.

And, unlike the lyrics in Elton’s John’s “Rocket Man,” it won’t be a long, long time. It’ll be right here and right now—in this parish family, at this table, in this bread and in this wine. So:

*Humble yourselves*

*Cast all your anxiety on him*

*Discipline yourselves, keep alert.*

*The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.*