



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A – Proper 15 – August 20, 2017



This morning the Cathedral remembers young Prince Albert, son of King Kamehameha the Fourth and Queen Emma, Crown Prince of Hawaii, heir to the Kamehameha Dynasty and who gave hope to the Hawaiian nation by insuring the continuation of the monarchy. And then he died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of four—a tragedy for his parents and a tragedy for the Hawaiian people for whom he was their hope. I understand the pain and heartache that people felt when Prince Albert died. I understand the pain and heartache of his parents.

A couple of weeks back I surprised many of you by posting a photo on Facebook of a dinner that I had with two of my brothers in San Francisco. A lot of you were surprised to learn that I even had brothers. I actually have three—one half-brother, Paul, who is the child of my mother and her second husband; and two more half-brothers, Graham and Tom, who are the children of my father and his second wife.

Today I have three brothers, but I should actually have four. I should actually have four because shortly after my father married his second wife, they had a son whom they named James. When James was born, I was five years old and I remember being so excited about going to see my father in Oregon and meeting my baby brother for the first time. But for me, that never happened. That never happened, because several weeks before I was supposed to get on the plane, I got a phone call letting me know that my brother James passed away at the age of only four months. My father and stepmother found him unconscious in his crib and rushed him to St. Vincent's Hospital in Portland, Oregon, praying for a cure, praying that he would live. But he died. And I never got to see him.

What do you say to people who lose their children? God had a plan for them? God took them because God needed them more than we did? It was God's will? I don't think those platitudes are very helpful. And like King Kamehameha and Queen Emma, I don't think my father and my stepmother ever recovered from the death of their son. They never got over it. They learned to accept it, but they never got over it. Until the day he died at the age of 53, I know my father missed his son. And while it was incredibly sad, I don't think it was God's plan. I don't think God needed James more than we did. I don't think it was God's will. What kind of loving God would do that to us?

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And as Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury says, “We humans cannot know the mind of God,” and in the midst of the mystery that is our human lives I have to ask, “Why wasn’t my brother healed the way the woman’s daughter in this morning’s Gospel was healed?” That’s the kind of question I ask myself every time I hear about one of the healing stories of Jesus – what about my kid brother? What about my kid brother? What about Prince Albert? Why weren’t they healed? And with those questions, I seek the healing presence of God, the healing presence; not the curing presence.

And I think we need to make a distinction between curing and healing. Prince Albert wasn’t cured. My brother James wasn’t cured. But I have a strong feeling they were healed, just like the Canaanite woman’s daughter was healed; bearing in mind that curing is what medical science does through medication, treatment, and intervention. Healing, on the other hand, means that one is restored to balance and harmony of spirit.

Did Prince Albert and my brother James feel the love of their parents as they left this world? Did they feel the fervent desire of the doctors and nurses to bring them comfort and relieve their pain? Did they feel the prayers of family and friends around them? If they did, and I’d like to think that they did, then they were undoubtedly restored to balance and harmony of spirit and, therefore, healed; healed because they felt the presence of God in the prayers and ministrations of those around them.

And does healing stop when someone dies? If the spirit lives beyond death, then I don’t think so. We pray, after all, for those who have died every Sunday in our Prayers of the People. I think Prince Albert continues to be healed as we continue and strive to do things like remembering him today, remembering his story and using it to inspire us to make a difference in people’s lives by reaching out to them in compassion and love. And the world really needs that right now. Just look back to last week and the events beyond our shores in Charlottesville, Virginia if you want proof of that.

Perhaps our services this morning are part of the continued healing process for Prince Albert, Queen Emma, and King Kamehameha the Fourth; healing because by acknowledging that needs and striving somehow to address it, we are restoring balance to what often seems like the broken Body of Christ in a church and in a world that often seems divided and disconnected from itself and those who live in it.

And so, you and I are agents in God’s healing process to God’s people, and like Jesus teaches us in this Gospel story this morning, we are called to bring healing, the restoration of the balance and harmony of the spirit, to everyone; not just a few people, or people of our choice, or people who are just like us, but to everyone. And that’s why when we baptize people, we promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons loving our neighbors as ourselves, that’s why we promise to respect the dignity of every human being, and that’s why we promise to strive for justice and peace among all people, whoever those people might be, especially those who are marginalized, marginalized like the Canaanite woman was marginalized, and we do that and we’re called to do that because that’s what Jesus did. And at the same time, like Jesus, we’re also called to pray for those who trouble us and who we feel cause us strife. And so this morning, we’re called to pray for the leaders of North Korea and those who rally in our streets to proclaim supremacy and hatred, because I don’t think Jesus believes only a certain group of people are worthy; he

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believes everyone is worthy. He believes everyone is beautiful in the eyes of God. He believes everyone is a child of God, whether they're black, white, gay, straight, rich, poor, male, female, local, *haole*, or whatever labels we use to make people "other" and not one of us. No one, even a Canaanite woman, is excluded or is to be excluded from the healing presence of God; the healing presence of God made manifest in our prayers, our compassion, and our call to reach out to everyone in Christian love.

And we bear in mind yet again that in her grief over the loss of her son, that's what Queen Emma did. For his sake, she reached out to all people and tried to make this world a better place by building churches, starting schools, and founding hospitals – churches, school and hospitals for everyone, doing for us what she didn't have the chance to do for her only son. She couldn't cure him, but she can heal.

Maybe that's why we feel compelled to remember Prince Albert today. It helps us remember to model that healing ministry for the children who gather here today to honor Prince Albert, that we're called to be a healing presence in God's world, a world where as Bishop Browning so poignantly said after he left Hawaii to serve as Presiding Bishop a world where, "there shall be no outcasts."

You and I can't cure everybody; but like Queen Emma, we certainly work to heal everybody—through our thoughts, through our words, and through our deeds. We may not be able to cure, but we can heal. May the story of Prince Albert and his untimely death help us to remember that, because then his untimely death at the tender age of four will not have been in vain and it will give deep and profound meaning to this gathering, to this worship, and to this story—a story that will be transformed from a history lesson into a life lesson of healing, compassion, and love.