



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Epiphany 1 – January 7, 2018: Queen Emma and Uncle Eddy Kamae

Life in Hawai'i is a life of relationships and connections. For many of us, it's about who you know, where you went to high school, who your family is, and where you're from. Then there are other connections – connections to the land, connections to the spirit, connections to our history, connections to our soul.

On Tuesday, I was in the Royal Chapel at Mauna Ala, the Royal Mausoleum in Nu'uau Valley. I was there for the birthday of Queen Emma and to offer the opening prayer. And as my feet were firmly planted on the ground where she is buried, I felt like I could grab onto her essence and ask it to come through to me, knowing that Queen Emma helps make me the priest I have become and continues to encourage me to engage in good works and do good things for the people I serve. And because of her story of serving her people and doing good works, I am somehow inspired to take my story and weave it into her story in small ways so that somehow together our spirits work to live into our covenants of baptism and together we seek to serve Christ in all persons and respect the dignity of every human being. That is Queen Emma's story.

Several years ago, I learned of yet another disappointment in Queen Emma's life, a disappointment over which she triumphs, when after the death of King Lunalilo she stands for election in a legislative ballot as a candidate against David Kalākaua to be the reigning monarch of Hawai'i. And she is defeated and faces another bitter setback in her life. Barbara Del Piano writes this of Queen Emma after Kalākaua's victory:

Queen Emma [sic] did not harbor ill feelings toward Kalākaua [sic], nor he toward her. In fact, the King invited her as an honored guest to the opening of the new legislature over which he would preside, and she accepted with grace. With head held high, she walked with stately dignity down the aisle of the new assembly hall and was seated in a place of honor.

And so it appears that on top of everything else, Queen Emma was a peacemaker. And it seems clear to me that Queen Emma is convinced that nothing can separate her from the love of God – a love of God manifested with head held high as she carries out her charitable works in the midst of turbulent times to leave us an honorable legacy that we can embrace this morning when we face turbulent times ourselves.

Her story gives us a glimpse into who she was and it also gives us an opportunity to be inspired about who we might become – peacemakers and people who engage in good works. Thank God for stories.

And as we remember Queen Emma, today we also have the opportunity to remember another Hawaiian legend and a man who was invested in telling stories so that we could enter into those stories and see and feel a little bit of ourselves in them. Today, as we honor Queen Emma, and on the first anniversary of his leaving us, we remember Uncle Eddie Kamae.

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And in terms of connections, Uncle Eddie was a good friend of my Auntie Irene and Uncle Mike who used to take him down to Waipio Valley where he met a man named Sam Lia and told his story, the story of a Hawaiian man who wrote music and lived off the land. Uncle Eddie also told the story of Luther Makekau, a man my grandfather and several of my uncles knew and who was quite a rascal from what I'm told. When Luther Makekau wanted to "borrow" pigs from other people, he would take bread soaked in vodka and feed it to the pigs, making them so drunk that they would fall over and he would simply scoop them up and put them in the back of his truck. And in Uncle Eddie's telling of that story, I get to enter in and he gives me permission to be a little bit of a rascal myself – something I much appreciate and very enthusiastically live into. Ask Auntie Myrna if you don't believe me!

And in another interesting Hawai'i kind of connection, when I lived and worked in Hilo, I got to know a gentleman by the name of the Larry Kimura who worked across the street from me at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo's School of Hawaiian language and studies. And then it turned out that Larry's sister Leo and my grandmother used to work together at Honoka'a School. And then I learned from Auntie Myrna that Larry Kimura and Uncle Eddie worked together to come up with a beautiful Hawaiian song that I remember from my childhood and the many trips that we would take to Keanakolu to go to my uncle's plum farm where we would have to travel through an area of the Big Island, an area known as Mānā. Larry Kimura wrote the words and Uncle Eddie Kamae write the music, the words and music to the iconic Hawaiian mele, *E Ku'u Morning Dew*.

The song says:

*My morning dew, wait a moment. Pay attention to what I call out.
Wait for me. I remain yours—with love
Dawn breaks and the wet dew sparkles,
causing a rosy color on these cheeks.
Up at Mānā, in the mist-shrouded highland,
there you and I will remain forever.*

And oddly enough, whenever I hear those lyrics I feel like time teleported from the familiarity of Mānā to the regality of Nu'uaniu, Mauna Ala, and the essence of Queen Emma because she remains with us forever in the story of her good works, just like Eddie Kamae will remain with us forever in the stories he told, the music he shared, and the lessons he imparted.

It's as if Queen Emma is saying to you and me, "Wait a moment. Pay attention. To what I call out." And what she calls out is an admonition to you and me to continue to engage in good works, to see Christ in all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being the way she respected the dignity of every human being and the way Eddie Kamae took the story of regular, salt of the earth human beings and made them special.

And if you and I enter into their stories, we also feel special and perhaps have the opportunity to see Christ in ourselves and for that we can be eternally grateful to the stories, stories and connections, connections to people, connections to place, connections to the land, connections to our history, connections to one another, and, ultimately, a connection to God.

E Ku'u Morning Dew ends with these words, words which we can embrace and take into our own hearts, into our own souls and then into our own stories, words that say this:

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*Ma laila nō kāua e pili mau ai
There, you and I will remain forever*

Thank you, Uncle Eddie Kamae. Thank you for inspiring us to tell stories that remind us that people like Queen Emma and the legacy that she leaves us will remain with us forever. And as we blend our lives into her story, we take the words and we offer them to her:

*Ma laila nō kāua e pili mau ai
There, you and I will remain forever*

Amen.