



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Epiphany 6 – February 11, 2018: King Kamehameha IV Birthday

At the Cathedral we hear a lot about Queen Emma, but very little about King Kamehameha the Fourth, our diocesan founder whose birthday we celebrate today. We hear little about King Kamehameha IV, but I know to my core that he embodied the words:

Let light shine out of darkness.



On Friday I sat in the Royal Chapel at Mauna ‘Ala (the royal mausoleum in Nu ‘uanu) to honor the birthday of the king. It was early - about nine o’clock in the morning. I sat and gazed at the king’s portrait that had been put on an easel in front of the altar for the ceremony. I sat and looked at His Majesty’s face. He didn’t smile and there was sadness in his eyes. Yet there was a sense of inner strength in his carriage. There was a certain kind of confidence in his regal bearing.

And as I sat, the sun began to rise higher in our Hawaiian skies, and I looked up over at the rose window on the Diamond Head side of the chapel. The daylight was coming in so bright, so intense, that I couldn’t see the window’s floral pattern and I was afraid I was going to damage my eyes. So I closed them – and there was no distraction. And then I remembered the words written in honor of the King, the words that say:

Ua nani ‘o Nu‘uanu i ka lau o ke kāwele - beautiful is Nu ‘uanu with the *kāwele* grass.

As you know, this is the first line of a *mele inoa*, a name chant, for King Kamehameha the Fourth. I remembered the words as I closed my eyes – as if the intense sunbeams compelled me to pay attention saying, “This man is worthy of your interest, your awareness, your admiration, and your respect.”

Let light shine out of darkness.

King Kamehameha IV reached out. He reached out to respond to those in need just as Jesus charges us to respond to those in need.

The year before the king ascended to the Hawaiian throne, he and Emma strove to let light shine out of the darkness. We remember, of course, that a smallpox epidemic hit the city of Honolulu. It had devastating effects, especially on the Hawaiian people. They had little or no immunity to the disease. Concerned by the decrease of the native Hawaiian population, he and Emma worked to build a hospital for the people. And when such efforts were annually defeated by the legislature, he tried a different, “outside-the-box” approach, challenging the citizens of Honolulu to pledge \$5000 toward the construction of a hospital building and in turn asking the legislature to match that amount.

Let light shine out of darkness.

“Our beloved Church regards her children as having bodies as well as souls to be cared for, and sanctions the consecration of these and all that is beautiful in nature and art to the service of God.” - Queen Emma

Epiphany 6 – February 11, 2018, cont'd

Kamehameha IV and Queen Emma contributed \$500 each from their personal funds. Then they eschewed the royal pomp and ceremony to which the Hawaiian people were accustomed from their royalty. Instead, they went into the stores and streets of Honolulu with notebooks in their hands encouraging their subjects to join them in saying, “I will reach out.” The citizens of Honolulu, touched by their humble gesture, contributed almost \$13,000 to the cause – and today we have the Queen’s Medical Center, the largest medical facility in the Pacific.

Ua nani ‘o Nu‘uanu i ka lau o ke kāwelu

The line from this *mele inoa* for Kamehameha IV is poignant, for the *kāwelu* is a tall grass that grows in clumps, especially on the slopes of Nu‘uanu Valley, and when the wind blows through the Pali, the *kāwelu* is quite resilient and able to withstand the wind’s forces, because it’s very flexible. It bends and flows with the wind. It isn’t rigid. It doesn’t break. It won’t uproot.

And like the *kāwelu*, King Kamehameha IV was able to withstand great winds of adversity, especially the effects of diseases that ravaged the lives of his subjects – and even though his portrait at the altar of the chapel at Mauna ‘Ala depicted eyes that were sad and a face without a smile, His Majesty exuded comforting confidence and conveyed inspiring strength.

Ua nani ‘o Nu‘uanu i ka lau o ke kāwelu

While the winds of change and adversity swirled around him (like they swirl around the *kāwelu* on the slopes of Nu‘uanu), he may have bended, he may have swayed, and he may have seemed as if he was thrown off kilter, but His Majesty’s roots remained firmly planted in the Hawaiian soil and his Anglican faith – and in compassion he reached out those in need like the Christ he worshiped reached out to those in need, giving His Majesty faith to say, “I will reach out.” And then, with Queen Emma, he moved into action and did whatever it took to build a hospital for the benefit of his people.

There’s a lesson in that for all of us, I think. Perhaps it’s to remember the *kāwelu* – firmly planted in the Hawaiian soil – bending, swaying, flexible – so that when the winds of adversity billow and blow around us, we not only survive – we also reach out with compassion to help those in need, our roots firmly planted in the gospel of Christ so that like Kamehameha IV, we too can say, “I will reach out in Christian love.”

How? We look to the example of His Majesty the King who steadfastly focused on the God who was revealed to him through his Anglican faith –through his prayers, through his worship, and through his compassionate, Christ-like service to those in need.

And we emulate our founder and our king – when we remain steadfastly focused on God – through our prayers, through our worship, and through our compassionate, Christ-like service to those in need – when like the king, our roots firmly planted in the gospel of Christ, we embody the words of Paul ourselves:

Let light shine out of darkness

After the simple but elegant ceremony in the Royal Chapel, our group processed to the Kamehameha Crypt, where the body of Kamehameha IV lies under the Hawaiian soil. At the crypt, I offered our beautiful *ho‘okupu* - our gift of love, admiration, and respect - a green rose lei entwined in a cluster fragrant tuberose, remembering that *ho‘okupu* are offerings of living things - living things that are given in the hope that the legacy of the recipient will live on into perpetuity.

Epiphany 6 – February 11, 2018, cont'd

Our *ho'okupu* to His Majesty and to the Christ we worship lives on in our prayers, in our worship, and in our compassionate service to those in need.

Let light shine out of darkness

So remember the *kāwele*, the grass on the slopes of Nu'uaniu, the grass that stands firmly rooted in the Hawaiian soil – and remember Kamehameha IV, our founder and king who reigns firmly rooted in the gospel of Christ.

In our winds of adversity, remember the *kāwele* and remember our king – our king now firmly rooted in the Hawaiian soil at Mauna 'Ala, the Royal Mausoleum – our king who calls us to live firmly rooted in the gospel of Christ.

And as he gazes upon our efforts to reach out with compassion to those in need, may His Majesty's sad eyes be happy and may a gentle smile, at long last, appear upon his noble face, confident that his people live out the words that he holds dear:

Let light shine out of darkness.

Amen.