



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 19, 2019: Queen Lili‘uokalani’s Baptism

This morning we honor and remember the Confirmation and Baptism of Her Majesty Queen Lili‘uokalani.

And we honor Her Majesty on a morning when the Gospel quotes Jesus, Jesus who says this:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

And nowhere is this notion of Christian love more embodied than in the life and story of the woman we honor this morning: Her Majesty Queen Lili‘uokalani, not only the Queen, but also our next-door neighbor.

Lili‘uokalanli sums up this notion of love in her famous composition *Ke Aloha O Ka Haku*, The Queen’s Prayer the same song we sing in this Cathedral every Sunday morning, the Cathedral where she worshipped after her overthrow. In that *mele*, the Queen says this:

O Lord your loving mercy is high as the heavens, it tells us of thy truth and is filled with holiness.

And as a result of that tenet, she goes on, out of love, to plead to God:

O look not on their failings, nor on the sins of men, forgive with loving kindness, that we might be made pure.

And while we often talk about her love for her people, I think we often overlook the love that people had for the Queen in return. It’s something we know, but not something we often talk about.

And while it should be unconditional, love should also be reciprocal.

We know that Lili‘uokalani lived next-door at Washington Place, and we also know that she was imprisoned at ‘Iolani Palace across the street.

And we also know that while she was imprisoned across the street at ‘Iolani Palace, she had flowers brought to her from her garden at her estate, Paoakalani, in Waikiki and that those flowers were wrapped in newspapers and this is how she got news of current events and things going on outside the walls of her palace prison. But what I didn’t know was that those flowers wrapped in the newspapers of the day were brought to her by a young man named John Wilson whose mother was a Mrs. Evelyn T. Wilson who was so devoted to the Queen and loved her so much that she voluntarily imprisoned herself with her in ‘Iolani Palace, and this is why her son John brought flowers from the Queen’s estate wrapped in those newspapers of the day.

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There seems to be a lot of love going around in that story, and it doesn’t end there, because what I also learned was that out of gratitude, the Queen penned a *mele* for John Wilson because of his regular ministrations to her and to the mother who voluntarily imprisoned herself in the Palace with Queen, and that song became a very famous Hawaiian *mele* in its own right. I am, of course, speaking of the song *Ku’u Pua I Paoakalani*, the song that says:

*O gentle breeze that waft to me
Sweet, cherished memories of you
Of my sweet never fading flower
That blooms in the fields of Paoakalani*

And then the last verse:

*Now name to me the one that I love
Gentle breezes passing by
And bring to me that fair blossom
That blooms in the fields of Paoakalani*

What beautiful words and what beautiful sentiments, especially when we think about what might be the underlying meanings of those words and who the fair blossom might actually be. It’s a love song in the true sense, a song of love, and of love going both ways.

And I think it’s also a song of love because it’s a gift where the Queen gives of herself, giving not from her material abundance, but from the abundance of her essence and the abundance of her soul.

And what can you and I take from that over a hundred years later? Maybe we can come to see that we all have an abundance of the soul that God calls us to give from and also to give back the kind of abundant love to others that we receive from them.

Not all of us can write songs, of course. But there are many gifts from within ourselves then we can offer—gifts like wisdom, presence, kindness, affirmation, compassion, sympathy, and empathy—just to name a few.

Whatever that gift is for you, whatever that gift is from you, offer it from yourself as an expression of love, knowing that you are loved in turn—loved by me, loved by others, loved by your church, and loved by God.

And may that expression of yourself be that gentle breeze that the Queen writes about and that wafts into the ether and blends itself into the Kingdom of God, making the words of Jesus come alive not only for you and those you love, but for those who crave God’s love and long to feel it as well.

And then, that’s really when we pay honor to Queen Lili’uokalani—by taking the love she had for others and the love others had for her, and sharing it with all people, because that’s what this devout Christian woman felt called to do herself.

And now we pay tribute to her with her beautiful *mele*, *Ku’u Pua I Paoakalani*.

Amen.