



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A – Epiphany 5, King Kamehameha IV

In our diocese we often remember and speak of Queen Emma, and rightly so. But sometimes I wonder if we do so at the expense of her husband, the King. It's understandable, I guess. She, after all, lived 20 years longer than he did. And in those 20 years she was able to accomplish a great deal—all of it making me wonder what more he would've accomplished had he lived as long as she did.

And on the day we honor the King, we have interesting images in our gospel that appeal to two of our senses—sight, where Jesus talks about seeing light that is not to be hidden; and taste, where Jesus talks about salt, the salt of the earth.

And the King is definitely a lamp that should not be hidden, but shine through history, shine through his accomplishments, shine through his life story, and shine through the legacy he leaves us, legacies like the Anglican Church in Hawai'i, that salt that gives flavor to our spiritual lives. We have sight. We have taste, but when I think of the King, I bring to mind the sense of smell because of the well-known chant written in his honor, the chant that says:

*ua nani o Nu'uaniu;
i ka lau o ke kāmēlu.*

beautiful is Nu'uaniu;
with the kāmēlu grass

Kāmēlu is a Hawaiian grass that likes dry, open spaces and rocky cliffs. And chants and hula refer to this grass for the way it moves and flows in the wind, similar to that of a graceful hula dancer, reminding us of the King's grace and eloquence at home and in courts abroad. I'm also told that this grass gives off a light fragrance and back in the day, one could smell it as it wafted on the air from the valleys of Nu'uaniu, bringing the essence of the King to us through its aroma.

And I can imagine also hearing and feeling the wind on my skin as it bears the aroma of the *kāmēlu* and so my awareness of the King heightens all my senses, bringing to mind the totality of who he was – the good and the bad, the negative and the positive.

There's an interesting tenet in Christian theology that says that what God looks for when we die is for us to offer up the totality of our lives from beginning to end, and to simply offer it all up as truth—the good and the not so good.

And the story of the King sets the stage for us to do just that, and we all remember that while he was a very scholarly man and an eloquent writer who founded a hospital, brought in a church, educated people, and wrote a wonderful preface to the Book of Common Prayer; we also remember that he had a horrible temper, that he was prone to depression and jealousy, and that he even shot a

“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.

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man—Henry Neilson. But then as if in an effort to bring the totality of his humanity full circle to remorse, redemption, and compassion, he cared for Mr. Neilson for the rest of the Mr. Neilson's life.

And we have these insights into the *totality* of the man who offered the story of his life, from beginning to end, who offered it all up to God as truth, saying, "Here it is. Take me. Take me good and bad. I am wholly yours."

His truth is revealed, his light shines, and he is the salt of the earth.

I think that when we think of King Kamehameha IV, we think of the hospital, we think of this church, we think of the palace . . .

But if I may share a personal insight, when I think of the King, in my mind's eye I go home to Hawai'i Island and the slopes of Mauna Kea to a beautiful place called Keanakolu, a place made famous by a song written by Kuana Torres Kahele several years ago.

But in the 1970s and 80s before Keanakolu became known to us in song, my Uncle Sai leased a plum farm there, a plum farm above the state cabins, very close to Waipunalei at Mauna Kea's 6000-foot level.

As a child I spent countless weekends in Keanakolu—climbing trees and picking fruit. And then when I was finally allowed to go off and play, I would find extraordinary things in the forest—Hawaiian snakes crawling on the ground, Hawaiian bats flitting among the koa trees.

But the main reason I associate the King with Keanakolu is because of his nickname, *'Iolani*, the heavenly hawk and one afternoon when I was there, I looked up into the blue Hawaiian sky because something caught my eye – a dark spot darting through the air. And when I looked closer, I realized that it was an *'io*, a Hawaiian hawk, going after a mouse, or a rat, or a baby mongoose, darting downward at great speed, slicing the air with its wings, going in doggedly for its kill.

And thinking back on that many years later, I have a new understanding of the name *'Iolani*, bearing in mind that Kamehameha IV sliced through life at great speed when that life came to a sudden end. But in spite of that, we know that it was not without thrill and not without glory—all of it embodied in the way that hawk dashed through the sky with gusto and with zest, helping us to remember that the King's life was a tenacious life, a focused life, a determined life, a life whose light shone brightly, albeit briefly; but that cast itself wide into history and as a legacy—and so we all get to sit in this beautiful Cathedral this morning, his legacy to us.

You know, we can't know how or what the King offered up as the totality of his life to God at his untimely death. But Hawaiian legend says that when we're born, we're given bowls of pure light to hold in front of us and we go through life. And then that lore goes on to say that as we go through our lives, we put rocks in those bowls that block that pure light—when we make mistakes, when we have unkind thoughts, when we cast judgments, when we hold resentments.

But the lore also says that we have an opportunity to take those rocks out of our bowls so that the light can shine forth like Jesus calls us to do in this morning's gospel—by forgiving, by doing random acts of kindness, by loving, by caring about others. We can't know the state of the bowl of

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light that the King offered at the end of his life. That's not our lot. But if his task was incomplete and a rock or two remained, we can help him. We can help him by allowing the light of his life continue to cast itself widely through *our* thoughts, through *our* words, through *our* deeds; casting itself upon us, giving us flavor so that however our lives unfold, that through his example we may courageously offer the totality of our lives to God as truth, knowing that like the King was loved by God, we are loved by God as well.

And as we remember and honor the King this morning, may the 'io, the Hawaiian hawk, that embodies his spirit continue to fly through our Hawaiian skies. And may that hawk take our prayers with it onward and upward through the skies we cherish to the King we honor and to the God we love.

And in turn, may the King's essence come back to us to remind us of the totality of our humanity—the good and the not so good. And may his essence come to us in the fragrance of the *kāwele*, perhaps borne of the wings of the 'io, as it darts downward toward our hearts, into our souls, and lands on our lives as his legacy of truth. And then may we embrace the words to honor him as words to honor ourselves as we bear the essence of our truth on the wings of the 'io, on its wings as it flies onward and upward to God.

*ua nani o Nu'uaniu;
i ka lau o ke kāwele.*

beautiful is Nu'uaniu;
with the *kāwele* grass

Amen.