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## *Mothers and Cities: From Atlanta to Hong Kong*

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**The Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Dean of The Cathedral of St. Philip**  
**A Sermon at The Cathedral of St. Philip**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year C**  
**(and Mothers Day)**  
**Revelation 21:10, 22 -22:5**  
**John 14:23-29**

*In the spirit the angel carried me away to a great, high mountain  
and showed me the holy city Jerusalem,  
the glory of God is its light, the nations will walk by its light."  
-Revelation 21:10, 22, 24*

I just love these passages from the Book of the Revelation to St. John! "The Book of Revelations" some people call it, but its real title is "THE Revelation, one revelation, to St. John." And it is a wild and crazy book.

Our usual reaction, especially among properly educated Episcopalians, is to dismiss the book as a kind of weird series of visions, maybe having something to do with first century Judea, and certainly not meant to be a recurring forecast, generation after generation, of the end times. We tend to laugh at how every generation of Christianity includes an element of naïve fundamentalists who believe that The Revelation to St. John was meant to forecast the particulars of the end of the world for our own time.

But I believe this book has other value. For one, it is a liturgical book. Have you ever noticed what the saints of God are doing throughout the book? They are singing and worshipping! If you want to use the Book of Revelation to forecast, use it to forecast what will be going on in the kingdom of heaven. People will be singing!

So, to those of you who do not like to sing: You better get used to it. You better practice singing now. Singing is practice for what will be going on in the kingdom of heaven.

Last week, at this moment, with about a twelve hour time change, I was in the booming metropolis of Hong Kong. (I will say more about that trip during the Dean's Forum today.) It was my great honor to have preached at the lovely St. Mary's Anglican Church, in Hong Kong. Named for the mother of our Lord, that church, in several ways, is a mother church for Hong Kong. It is one of the largest and oldest strictly Chinese-speaking Anglican churches in Hong Kong. I think it was the first sermon I have ever preached which was translated simultaneously into Chinese, translated by my good friend, Joey Fan.

Today, I want to tell you something of what I preached to them. First, I used various passages from the Book of Revelation. Revelation was the text for the epistle lesson last week, too. Their singing was wonderful, and their choir members, in

particular, liked what I had to say about singing being good practice for the kingdom of heaven.

They were polite enough to provide for me an English hymnal, with English words for the tunes they were singing; and the tunes were familiar tunes. However, while all the rest of the congregation was singing in Chinese, I and my three North American friends (two from the United States and one from Canada) were singing in English.

It felt a bit like the kingdom of heaven, each of us singing the same hymn in different languages. So, my worship last week, at St. Mary's Anglican Church in Hong Kong, was a small forecast of what the kingdom of heaven will be like, at least according to the Revelation to St. John.

Of course, I brought that congregation your greetings, the greetings and grace of this grand place, the Cathedral of St. Philip, in Atlanta, Georgia. Wherever I go on this globe, I am honored to bring first, the grace and greetings of this parish. I serve as your representative!

But I also talked about cities, the city of Atlanta and the city of Hong Kong. In fact, that is the other way I used the Book of Revelation in that sermon, and another reason I like the book. The Revelation to St. John is about a city. Indeed, the last book of the bible, Revelation, is about a city, the great city of God.

The FIRST book of the Bible, Genesis, begins in a garden. Have you ever noticed, then, that the entire Bible begins in a garden, and it ends in a city? The story of scripture begins in a garden and ends in a city. I believe that our story, the Christian story, begins in a garden, with innocence and individual temptation, with brotherly love that is followed by brotherly murder, then exclusion and wandering. And then, slowly, surely, steadily, the Christian story ends in a city. The story begins in a garden, and it ends in a city.

Great cities, cities like Atlanta and Hong Kong, are meant to be foretastes of the heavenly city, the new city, the New Jerusalem, saints in the kingdom of heaven. It was my responsibility last week to proclaim to Hong Kong the vision of one of Atlanta's great saints, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who used a special and recurring image to describe the church and the city. He said that God calls us, church and city alike to a "beloved community." The vision that Dr. King proclaimed was that of a "beloved community," a beloved community of peace and justice.

My translator last week, who has become my great friend, did not know exactly how to translate that phrase, "beloved community." He knew what it meant, literally, but he also realized that it has acquired some specialized and nuanced meaning. And so, he actually looked up Martin Luther King on the internet in Chinese and noted how other Chinese linguists have translated the phrase "beloved community."

Whatever phrase he used, it caught on with the St. Mary's, Hong Kong community. After church last Sunday, they had a birthday lunch for everyone in the parish who would be celebrating a birthday that month. In his opening prayer, the pastor, Chong Ki Lak, used that very phrase "beloved community," to describe his flock. I was touched, and I believe God was touched, too.

I was a bit jet-lagged when I returned to Atlanta on Monday afternoon. So, I was not at the Cathedral first thing Tuesday morning. I arrived in time to attend the Tuesday mid-day Eucharist; and I am glad I did. Canon Carolynne Williams was the celebrant and preacher on Tuesday, and she preached a concise and sensitive homily on the subject of motherhood. It was not Mothers Day last Tuesday, but it was the feast of St. Monica, the mother of the great St. Augustine of Hippo.

Besides the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Mary, there are not many other mothers whom the Christian tradition raises up for guidance and instruction. Monica is generally credited with the conversion of Augustine to Christianity. Whatever wandering and misbehavior Augustine experienced, Monica kept him in prayer. (To you mothers today: your child's wandering and misbehavior is no match for that of Augustine!). Monica kept him in prayer. Finally, Augustine found the risen Christ, or, that is, he turned and accepted the risen Christ who had been pursuing him; and, of course, Augustine became one of Christianity's most important theologians.

When Canon Williams was describing Monica last Tuesday, at our mid-day Eucharist, she used an important word to describe the ministry of mothers. First of all, she acknowledged that the care and concern of mothers does not stop when

children become older. In fact, as children grow from their early years through adolescence, and then leave the house, the work of motherhood does not get any easier. The role and ministry of mother does not end when children become adults themselves. In fact, Canon Williams acknowledged, the ministry of mothers actually becomes harder as children become adults!

But then she used an important word. The chief characteristic of mothers is "interiority," an interiority of love and care for their children. I took that to mean that mothers always carry an interior appreciation, an interior love, an interior worry, and interior admiration, for their children, no matter how old the child is. The behavior of children will always affect their mothers, whether the mother shows it in an exterior way or not. The mother always carries about an interior connection with the child, an interior love for the child.

We salute all mothers on this Mothers Day. Perhaps this interiority that Carolynne Williams spoke of last week is amplified in the role of grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Whatever type of mother you are today: godmother, mother-in-law, mother-to-be, whatever, we salute you and give thanks that interior disposition that makes you care and worry, and love.

Of course, the great movement of ministry, and the great movement of spirituality, the great movement of Christianity, is to move from garden to city, to move from seed in the ground to flower in bloom, to make what is interior also be exterior - to show forth in our lives what we believe in our hearts. The great movement of true spirituality is to make love incarnate, to make love flesh and blood.

This is the ministry of great mothers, and it is also the ministry of great cities: to incarnate love. To make love real. To make justice and peace living realities instead of just dreams and hopes.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My own peace, I give to you." But we are not supposed to keep it to ourselves. We are supposed to incarnate it, to make it real in our families and in our cities.

Some of you may know that our observance of "Mother's Day," today derives from the inspiration of Julia Ward Howe, who was really one of the early feminists of the nineteenth century. It was she who wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" during the Civil War.

After the Civil War, she was devastated by the ruin and destruction of her country, both north and south. And so she proposed that women, women in particular, ought to gather together to proclaim a new peace, a peace without war and violence.

She was on to something. Listen to a portion of her "Mother's Day Proclamation," written in 1870:

*Arise then...women of this day!  
Arise, all women who have hearts!  
Whether your baptism be of water or of tears!*

*Say firmly:  
"We will not have questions answered by irrelevant agencies,  
Our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage,  
For caresses and applause.  
Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn  
All that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.  
We, the women of one country,  
Will be too tender of those of another country  
To allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."*

*From the bosom of a devastated Earth a voice goes up with  
Our own. It says: "Disarm! Disarm!  
The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."  
Blood does not wipe out dishonor,*

*Nor violence indicate possession.  
As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil  
At the summons of war,  
Let women now leave all that may be left of home  
For a great and earnest day of counsel.*

*Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.  
Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means  
Whereby the great human family can live in peace...  
Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar,  
But of God -*

*In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask  
That a general congress of women without limit of nationality,  
May be appointed and held at someplace deemed most convenient  
And the earliest period consistent with its objects,  
To promote the alliance of the different nationalities,  
The amicable settlement of international questions,  
The great and general interests of peace.*

Those words are stirring! As far as I know, no such women's congress, in the name of international peace, ever assembled. But that vision is still among us. And it is being made real in families, and in cities, all over the world.

All of us, from family to family here in Atlanta, from family to family in Hong Kong, have been left a measure of peace, God's peace, in Jesus Christ, our Lord. And we are trying, each in our own way, to make that vision real in the world around us. We are working together for a beloved community, a holy city that comes ever closer to the heavenly city, the holy kingdom of God. Let's practice. Let's practice for the kingdom of God, by practicing love and community here on earth.

AMEN.

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