
The Lord God Bird!

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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I was in a hotel room in grimy New Haven last week, up early, about to say my prayers, when I glanced at the morning newspaper. I could not believe what I read there. Sightings had been confirmed, more than once. An ivory-billed woodpecker has been confirmed alive in the deep swamps of Arkansas.

Why should this matter to me? I am getting ready for Mother's Day this Sunday, preparing to observe my parents' birthdays this month. I am still trying to raise the last dollars of our capital campaign. I am trying to say good-bye to some excellent Cathedral staff, and to hire more excellent staff. I have programs to develop and books to read. I have people to visit and sermons to write. I have a lot to do.

But I have been dreaming of the ivory-billed woodpecker almost all my life, certainly after the first time I learned the difference between it and its cousin, the pileated woodpecker. The pileated woodpecker is great enough, and they never fail to fascinate me. I will stop for a moment every time I see or hear one. I sat in a canoe once, with my wife, for almost an hour watching the beauty of two grand pileated woodpeckers feeding.

I learned as a child that the pileated's cousin-the great ivory-billed woodpecker-was probably extinct. This ivory-billed woodpecker species was last seen in 1944, and its habitats of dense swamps have been gradually shrinking. As a child, I-and many others-refused to believe it was extinct. The very notion of extinction fascinated me. But today, bird books, one by one, have stopped listing the ivory-billed at all.

My brother-in-law tells a dear story about his childhood. His Buckhead home had a great stand of trees behind it before Georgia 400 came through; and he loved birdwatching. One day, he rushed in to tell his father that he had personally spotted the ivory-billed woodpecker again. His patient father understood. All of us want to find something that once was lost.

Lord God! That was the phrase most commonly uttered whenever anyone saw the ivory-billed woodpecker, back in its glory days. So it became the Lord God bird. And I daresay it is the phrase being uttered during this past week of its re-discovery. Lord God! This is huge! Yes, we have lots of other things going on in our lives, lots of good people and dear projects. But the re-discovery of this grand bird means that there is still hope out there. Even when we have dried up our wetlands and paved over our pastures, Nature's God-and ours-has provided hope again.

Lord God! This is what many of us say whenever we find something that was lost. They are words not just of amazement, but of thanks, as well. And they are words of amazing grace. I, myself, once was lost, but now I'm found. I was blind, and now I see.

All this is the work of the God of Resurrection, the Easter God which we celebrate this time of year. The Resurrection of Jesus means that death is not the last word. Not even extinction is the last word. The ivory-billed woodpecker has risen from the dead almost like the ancient phoenix. This means that we can rise again, too. We can fly again, too. We can see again, too. Lord God! I once was lost, but now I'm found.

Sam Candler signature



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