
Welcome Back

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

"Welcome back," sang John Sebastian about twenty years ago, after he had graduated from his folk rock days. I sure did like John Sebastian in those earlier days, when he sang in "The Loving Spoonful" and then when he did a gorgeous solo album with "Magical Connection" and "I Had a Dream." Folks told me I might look like him, and I believed them, as long as I did not look in the mirror.

"Welcome back," I said to the beautiful and mild weather last week. I actually had a free afternoon last Sunday—a true Sunday—and I sat outside and listened to the Atlanta Braves spring training baseball game. Yes, I know we have an almost completely different set of players this year, but it sure is the same team. Welcome back, Bobby Cox; and welcome back to baseball and to spring training. I could quote here the dozens of dreamy paeons to spring baseball. The title of one of Thomas Boswell's great books is all I need: "Why Time Begins on Opening Day."

"Welcome back," I sang out to the goldfinches that have found my bird-feeder again this Spring. Even after my family has moved to a new house, I just know those are the same birds. Welcome back to the hawks that were circling the neighborhood when the weather was so clear. Welcome back to the green leaves now appearing on the hydrangeas.

"Welcome back," I have been saying to all sorts of people lately. This is the time of year to do that: to come back home. Some people are returning to church life from other places; some people are coming back to Cathedral life in particular. On Monday at my Rotary meeting, I spoke to a Presbyterian minister, a good colleague of mine. He noted that people come to church most often from January through Easter. Outside of those times, the attendance drops; we seem too distracted by everything else—from spring mountains to summer beaches to fall football games.

I believe in welcoming people back. When I have traveled, I know how good it is to return home to the familiar; my whole demeanor relaxes. When I have been confused and bitter, I know how gracious it is to be welcomed back to community and friends. When I have been wrong and off base, I know how it is to be forgiven and set free.

Lent is a time to come back. These forty days before Easter are the time to return to prayer and self-examination, study and service. What do I really believe about God and Jesus Christ and the Christian faith itself? These issues in family and business, in friends and in strangers: what is it that my faith provides me for them?

These Lenten days are meant to prepare a welcome. These days in the desert can actually be some of the most fertile of our lives. They can prepare us for the welcoming back of new life itself. At the core of Christianity is love, yes—are peace and forgiveness, yes—is the cross of suffering and sacrifice, yes. All that is the core. But the core is made real, the core becomes evident and alive in the Resurrection. What is my Christian faith about? It is about resurrection and being born again.

If we truly believe in resurrection and in new life, then we can welcome back anytime—not just in Spring and not just during baseball season and not just whenever we hear our favorite musicians of a bygone era. Resurrection means welcome. I thought I was dead. I thought I was old. I thought I was forlorn and angry. I thought I would never be the same again. I thought I would never return. To all that, over and over again, God says "Welcome back."

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*