

Gratitude and Preparation and Improvisation!

An article for *The Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, Dean of the Cathedral



Thank you! And thank you again! And thank you over there, too!

Holy Week and Easter 2025, were tremendous and glorious at the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip this year. And they were glorious because you were prepared! Thank you!

Each year, I remind the Cathedral parish—and especially the staff!—to practice doing the routine things well, and especially doing routine things well around Holy Week. Because, there will always be something unexpected that happens during the traditional holy times of the year. Around Christmas, for sure. And around Easter, even more.

Inside the subconscious of pretty much everyone, something decides to get both spiritual and religious around Holy Week. People decide that now is the right time to ask that hard spiritual question of their companion, or to make that first meeting with whatever religious figure they have been meaning to engage for months. Now seems to be the time. Sometimes we act out without even realizing we are acting out.

Other things happen, too. They just do, and they always seem to happen around Holy Week. Our liturgies and prayers and sermons and anthems and pastoral visits are always complicated; but they become even more complex around Holy Week. That is actually fine! That is how it should be! Thus, I advise friends to have things prepared! The better you have the routine things down, the better you can handle the non-routine things that happen!

So it was, for instance, that the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip assembled one of our most beautiful funerals of the year, on the Monday of Holy Week. Those of you who know, know that funerals are Easter services! We do them well at the Cathedral, and we rejoice in them. We conducted the funeral of one of our most devoted and admired parishioners on the Monday of Holy Week! We had to change things! We had to write and sing and re-vest and re-assemble and turn Palm Sunday into Easter in one day! And we did it! It was a beautiful service. Thank you! We could do it because you—YOU!—were prepared.

The rest of the week went similarly. On Tuesday, we hosted around 180 ordained and lay persons, of one ilk or another—and many Lutherans, too—for a diocesan renewal of vows service. We prepared and improvised there, too! Good improvisation, by the way, utterly depends upon practice and preparation. Just ask our organists! They do it well.

We developed creative children's services for Holy Week. We found new readers for some of our most important services. By the time the Easter Vigil started—at 6:00 am on Easter morning!—we had excelled even more at improvisation. At 5:15 am, the altar guild had hastily re-configured dogwood branches for the baptismal asperges.

But, the best. THE BEST! Yes, I am giving an award this year for the best improvisation of Holy Week 2025. And I do not like to give awards for the best, because we are all the best. [Just read my Easter sermon!](#) (Being first does not matter in the kingdom of heaven, but being last just might!) Yes, I give the improvisation award of the week, and maybe of the year, to the Cathedral Sexton staff!

Those of you who—like me!—enjoy and adore the 6:00 am Easter Vigil service, with its great fire and darkness and water and light and love and life—you know, that we love having the church in complete darkness as we arrive. All our devoted ushers and acolytes and musicians and staff know that all lights must be OFF by 5:30 am. That way, the devoted parishioners and people of God approach the Cathedral in real darkness, and the only light we see is the Great New Fire of Easter, the bonfire, down in the Horseshoe Drive.

Every year, our incredibly brilliant sexton staff excels in making sure the various lights of our campus, and our city, are out. In the past two years, we have had to make sure the city didn't have its new Peachtree Road light glaring at us. (However, a few weeks ago, a car hit that pole, and the city just didn't replace that light yet. Thank you!). This year, they had been making sure that our new Good Faith Chapel construction lights would all be out. Thank you!

Well, this year, there was still another new challenge. Remember, there will always, always, be an unexpected challenge! Somehow or another, a new city light had emerged, on the Andrews Drive side of the Cathedral Nave, actually on our property, that was casting a huge glow into the Cathedral Nave at 5:30 am. It is not supposed to be light in there! What to do?

The Cathedral Sexton Staff rose to the occasion. They were the great signs of rising up—of resurrection!—on Easter morning. I will not show you the particulars of what they did. You have to see it to believe it! Like Resurrection, actually. Ask someone at the Cathedral about it! Spread good gossip! Get someone to show you how the sextons prepared the way for new life and resurrection.

They get it. They know how to be prepared. They know how to improvise. They showed us the creative power of resurrection! I give overwhelming thanks for them, and for all of YOU who show the world new life and love. Alleluia!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip