
Lift Up Your Hearts!

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Second Sunday of Advent – Year A
The Annual Meeting of the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip

“Lift up your hearts!
We lift them up to the Lord!”
(from *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 361,
and from *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus of Rome, 170-235 AD)

“**Lift up your hearts,**” prays the priest at this altar every Sunday in our eucharist services. Some of us hear those words every day. On this Sunday of our Annual Parish Meeting, I am heartened! I am heartened to report that people are lifting up their hearts! We are a place that lifts people’s hearts. Thank you for a holy and heartening year!

We pray in this church. And we gather daily for holy moments, both joyful and sad. We gather for baptisms and funerals, celebrations and laments, education and mission, music and contemplation. The Cathedral of St. Philip stewards those moments with grace, excellence, and hospitality. We lift our hearts with optimism, and initiative, and communication! And God blesses all those moments here. I bless them, too!

In my sermon this morning, I want to talk about how we are lifting up our hearts in this church. In this past year, we have lifted up hearts, and hands, and eyes, and voices, and heads, and souls!

“**Lift up your hands!**” Psalm 10:12 prays, “Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed.” And we are God’s hands in this world. This year, we have served the poor and the oppressed. Our mission work is heartening! In an amazing transaction this past year, we completed the transfer of our physical Cathedral Towers ministry to an organization who is far more able and efficient in the details of that service. While we continue our good pastoral care in that facility (now named Parish Grove), we have also received over \$40 million for the lease of the property (not the sale of the property), money which we have committed to the continuation of our ministry in low-income senior housing. Our new Cathedral Towers Fund will commit annual distributions to a wider network of ministries.

In other outreach and mission efforts, “Cathedral Giving By Design” raised over \$330,000 for Wellspring Living! We have shepherded new relationships with intown ministries such as Intown Cares. Beautiful parishioners and friends served our Homeless Dinner and requiem. And so many parish groups have lifted up hands with the Church of the Common Ground. The Cathedral Farmers Market, the Cathedral Preschool, the Cathedral Counseling Center, also continue to be integral parts of our mission and outreach.

Yes, we have lifted up our hands in mission this past year. However, each of us has our own particular vocation of lifting up our hands in mission, too. Every one of our daily vocations — from business hands to parenting hands — is actually our mission and service in the world. Thank you!

“**I lift up my eyes**” prays Psalm 121:1, and we have been thrilled this past year to lift our eyes to the ascension of the new Good Faith Chapel. Just over a year ago, we prayed Psalm 121 as we broke ground. “Levavi Oculus,” begins that psalm; “we lift our eyes up to the hills, from which comes our help.” We have been lifting up our eyes ever since, lifting up the structural outlines of the building, then lifting up a massive steel beam, with many of our signatures and names written on it! (That beam is now installed in the oculus.)

We now lift up our hearts and eyes in the eager expectation of a beautiful new and creative space for prayer, contemplation, service, and imagination. Yes, the Cathedral of St. Philip is about lifting up. It is about lifting up

eyes and hearts, in new and imaginative prayer. Oh, how I look forward to more prayer in this holy place, and in this holy community.

“Lift up your voices!” Isaiah 40:9 says, “Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” And how our voices sing here! The music of our cathedral choirs leads us to new heights. So do the organs, and pianos, and even guitars around this community. Lift up your voices! We speak good tidings in this community; “Here is your God,” we sing.

“Lift up your heads!” Psalm 24:7 says, “Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in.” Of course, “Lift up your heads” means be attentive and hopeful; but I believe it also means “Use your head!”, “Use your minds!” Thus, we continue to lift up a new identity in this church. We are stewards of a careful, thoughtful, theological tradition here, a tradition built upon both scripture and reason.

At the Cathedral of St. Philip, we are a different and new identity in the world. We are not just a political party at prayer, no matter what that party is. I say this over and over again: We are bigger than any political party. We are larger than any civic identity. We are Christians, and healthy Christianity has been navigating culture and politics for over two thousand years. We did not just begin our theological study yesterday. We depend upon the tradition of centuries of theological and biblical scholarship! With such a strong tradition, we welcome beauty and truth in such people as the poet Pádraig Ó Tuama, who was our excellent Spirituality Conference speaker.

The very title of this sermon today, “Lift Up Your Hearts,” the very words that we use to begin the Eucharistic Prayer, “Lift up your hearts,” have been the church’s words since the late second century AD., in the times when the Church was first learning to navigate the complexities of Christianity and Culture. We have learned what it means to be both a Christian and a member of whatever culture is around us. These are not new issues. We learn. We teach.

And we lift up our heads around Scripture. The Bible. The Bible in its fullness and complexity. It is not just a law book, or rule book, for us in the Cathedral of St. Philip. It is the collection of our family traditions and family stories and family discussions. We hear each other in the Bible, and we reform each other in the Bible. In conversations with Scripture, we learn about God and neighbor. And we learn what love is, love of God and love of neighbor.

“Lift up your soul!” Psalm 25:1 prays, “To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.” And so we do. We lift our souls to God in this holy community, throughout the holy moments of our lives, from baptisms to funerals.

We have lifted up hearts in this past year! And we have lifted up eyes, and hands, and voices, and heads, and souls. And we will delight in lifting up heart and soul in the year to come!

On this Sunday of our annual parish meeting, I give thanks for this parish! You lift up my soul! Thank you! Thank you to this most excellent staff, clergy and lay, who lift up my soul, and who lift up the souls of faithful parishioners. Thank you to these most excellent parishioners and friends, this most excellent congregation, who lifts up the souls of so many around us. Thank you!

Lift up your hearts! We lift them up to the Lord!

AMEN!

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