
Welcome Home!

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

Welcome home! It is the time of year to welcome each other back. Welcome back, Ted Lasso! Welcome home, Odysseus! There are so many who teach us the way back home. Welcome back to the Cathedral, you who have been away this summer! Welcome back to the Cathedral, you who may have been away for a few years! Welcome to seekers who are at the Cathedral of St. Philip for the first time! It is time to be joyful! It is time to be joyful in God's house of prayer.

In the sixth century B.C., a group of God's people were in exile, longing to return home. A prophet calling himself Isaiah proclaimed what that return to a rebuilt house would look like. He said of God's new house that "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." That image, "a house of prayer for all people," has become a welcoming and powerful description for our church today, the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip. We enjoy welcoming, and serving, and praying with, all sorts and conditions of God's people here.

Isaiah, in his new vision, described a new quality of God's renewed house of prayer. According to the prophet, it would not be a place that was closed, laden with stiff law and with sacrifices that did not serve the poor. It was to be a new place. A new Jerusalem, a new home. He said, "Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say 'The LORD will surely separate me from his people;' and do not let the eunuch say, 'I am just a dry tree.'" (56:3). According to Isaiah, God says about the eunuchs and the foreigners, "these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Isaiah 56:7).

The prophet Isaiah had a vision of a new temple, a new assembly of God's people, that included not just the exiles of Israel, but also outsiders everywhere. Philip the deacon caught that vision, too, when he climbed up into the chariot to serve the Ethiopian eunuch, who was both a foreigner and one with a so-called blemish. The Cathedral of St. Philip is named for that very deacon.

We have welcomed and enjoyed the diversity of God's people here at the Cathedral. But there is another word from Isaiah's vision that I want to emphasize this year in our service and worship. It is "joyful!" Isaiah said that God "will make them joyful in his house of prayer." I have experienced that! It is fun, it gives us great joy, when we gather with the multitude of God's people: with insiders and outcasts, with those who have been here for generations, and with those who got here yesterday!

God intends for us to be joyful in this house of prayer! And we are! This year we will also be living into a new room in our house of prayer, the Good Faith Chapel. What a glorious and uplifting space that is, a space for blessing. When we touch awe in that space, we touch joy. When we touch each other in that space, we touch joy.

Join us in joy! It is time to come home to joy, even if you have never been here before. How wonderful it is to be part of a community that blesses people, that blesses all sorts of people. And thank you! Thank you to all who have been steadily serving and praying at home, preparing for a new year here. We are not only a house of prayer for all people. We are joyful in that house of prayer!