

SERMON, ST. JOHN'S PROPER 8

“E 'onipa'a i ka 'imi na'auao,” often weakly translated as “Be steadfast in the seeking of knowledge,” was the motto of Queen Lili'uokalani. “Onipa'a,” which is a rich word meaning not only “steadfast,” but “fixed, immovable, firm, resolute and determined,” had been the motto of King Kamehameha V, Lota Kapuāiwa, Hawaiian monarch back in the 1860s. He was, indeed, strong and determined to defend the rights of the Hawaiian people in the face of demographic collapse, erosion of cultural values and the rising spectre of US colonial desire. He was also, by the way, determined to establish Hawai'i as a monarchy on the model of Great Britain with the “Reformed Catholic Church of Hawai'i”, that is the Episcopal Church, as the national religion. Locally, he is credited with founding Good Shepherd Church in Wailuku.

Queen Lili'uokalani, overthrown in 1893 by a coalition of mostly American sugar and political interests, added to Kamehameha V's simple “onipa'a” the words, “i ka 'imi na'auao.” That word “na'auao” is also a rich and complex word, rooted in the Hawaiian understanding that the “na'au,” the guts or intestines, was the location of both thinking and feeling, heart and mind. Fascinatingly, the ancient Hebrews also believed that the intestines were the seat of the emotions. When Jesus is moved by suffering, for example, the Greek boldly says that his guts literally turned. In Hawaiian, “Ao” means “light,” daylight, dawn, or enlightened,” so “na'auao” literally means “enlightened guts,” the heart or mind illuminated, rather poorly translated as “knowledge,” but better understood in terms of “wisdom” or “enlightenment.” Really, the Queen's motto has the sense of “being resolute in seeking enlightenment.” In the tragic years that followed the overthrow, the Hawaiian people desperately needed enlightenment, both in the sense of guidance and in terms of finding hope through and beyond the loss of their nation. The Queen's “onipa'a,” her determination ceaselessly to fight for the rights of her people by fearlessly standing for them before both the US government and all the world in the face of terrible odds did, indeed, gives hope to Hawaiians. She continues to this day to be a source of great hope and inspiration to the Hawaiian people and every year on January 17, the anniversary of the overthrow, the day is commemorated as “Onipa'a Day” with a march for steadfastness in the pursuit of sovereignty from the Royal Mausoleum at Mauna Ala to 'Iolani Palace.

The most moving story for me among the events following the overthrow was the Queen's imprisonment in her own Palace for the better part of a year after an abortive uprising of the Hawaiian people early in 1895. She was incarcerated in an upper room with the windows blackened so she couldn't see out and she was abandoned by her beloved Kawaiaha'o Congregational Church where she had served as choir director for many years. When the Episcopal Bishop, Alfred Willis, bishop at the time of St. John's founding a few years later, reached out to her, she made the decision to become an Episcopalian. But what stands out most exquisitely from this dark time in her life was her “onipa'a,” not simply to remain steadfast for the rights of her people, but to remain resolute in her determination not to allow her enemies to triumph over her heart and soul, to make her succumb to the the darkness of bitterness and hate. In prison, she wrote what I believe to be her finest musical legacy, “The Queen's Prayer,” a

hymn of forgiveness, demonstrating that true “na□auao”, “enlightment,” means standing for the light, power and triumph of love in the face of darkness.

`O kou aloha nô
Aia i ka lani
A `o Kou `oia `i`o
He hemolelo ho`i



Your loving mercy
Is as high as Heaven
And your truth
So perfect

Ko`u noho mihi `ana
A pa`ahao `ia
`O `oe ku`u lama
Kou nani ko`u ko`o

I live in sorrow
Imprisoned
You are my light
Your glory, my support

Princess Ka`iulani

Mai nânâ `ino`ino
Nâ hewa o kânaka
Akā e huikala
A ma`ema`e nô



Behold not with malevolence
The sins of man
But forgive
And cleanse

No laila e ka Haku
Ma lalo o kou `êheu
Kô mâkou maluhia
A mau loa aku nô

And so, o Lord
Protect us beneath your wings
And let peace be our portion
Now and forever more

`Âmene

Amen

Queen Lili`uokalani

The Queen later wrote, “It was the intention of the officers of the government to humiliate me by imprisoning me, but my spirit rose above that. I was a martyr to the cause of my people, and was proud of it.”

So, in today’s Gospel, we have those moving words, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Luke is the only Gospel-writer who uses this terminology to describe the “onipa□a” of Jesus, and he says it several times. Jesus is resolute, determined, steadfast, in fulfilling his mission of standing for the light of Perfect Love in the face of this world’s darkness and he knew full-well what Jerusalem would mean for him. Jesus is resolute in taking up the Cross. The road itself is a hard one: they come to a Samaritan town, but the people won’t receive him because “his face was set toward Jerusalem” and the Samaritans hated the Jews. The disciples want to punish those people, but Jesus’ rebukes their desire to fight hate with hate. On the way to Jerusalem they encounter people who think they want to follow Jesus, but they don’t have the strength and resolution to do so without reservations, for they throw up excuses as to why they can’t follow “just yet.” “No one,” Jesus says, who “puts a hand

to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.” It’s not that Jesus doesn’t care about proper burial of the dead or saying goodbye to loved ones – it’s just that one’s commitment to the sacrificial love, justice and freedom of the Kingdom, must remain resolute and we must not look back. Paul writes in Galatians, “Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” We can, indeed, be slaves to a host of things that bedevil us, causing us to lose sight of what is ultimately the truth that will set us free, the knowledge that we are loved and called to be lovers. We hold on to old grievances, we play the old tapes of self-loathing, we thwart the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives by grasping for power and domination over others. That is the yoke of slavery. But when we, like Jesus, set our face toward Jerusalem to stand for the power of sacrificial Love to transform the world, or like Liliuokalani, stand firm, “onipa’a”, for what is “pono,” what is right – when we stand for justice and forgiveness, we are free. This is how you and I can, like Liliuokalani, make a difference in this world and bear forth the splendid healing gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, all of which are signs of God’s Kingdom breaking in upon us. E ONIPA A I KA IMI NA AUAO!! Sisters and Brothers, stand firm and resolute in bringing life and light to this darkened world and don’t look back!