



St John's Cathedral 聖公會聖約翰座堂

Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong Island
Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui

Message of Hope: Care for the least among us

24th September 2020
The Very Revd Matthias Der, Dean

Thank you for joining us for the Message of Hope. I am Dean Matthias Der of St John's Cathedral, Hong Kong.

This past week, we celebrated the 171st anniversary of St John's Cathedral. The ministry of this place actually began in 1843, when the young British missionary to China, The Revd Vincent Stanton was appointed the first colonial chaplain. The construction of the cathedral began in 1847 and was completed two years later, in 1849. Hong Kong was a tiny, insignificant fishing village back then. The cathedral tower was the tallest building in the city, overlooking the entire island and the Kowloon peninsula. It also symbolized God's care and love over his people.

We are very blessed that after 171 years, much of the original cathedral structure still survives. The tower, the porch, the west door, and the nave were all part of the original building. Some of the pews in the cathedral today are the original furnishings. You may have noticed that the pews are rather deep and wide; this is because they needed to accommodate the swords of the officers and the puffy dresses of the ladies in the Victorian era. The cathedral chancel was extended to its current size in 1873.

I find it quite moving to know that, from the time of its conception, the cathedral has stood steadfast, weathering storms of war, disease, and political instability, never ceasing in its service to the community and sharing of God's love. During this current time of difficulty, we can be confident and reassured that the cathedral community and God himself will see us through this crisis as well.

Do you know that this cathedral actually went through another deadly plague before COVID-19? The cathedral history book, *Imperial to International*, written by parishioner Stuart Wolfendale, describes the deadly bubonic plague that ravaged Hong Kong in 1894. More than 2,500 people in Hong Kong died in that pandemic. The government went door to door in search of those who had been infected and put them on a quarantine ship off-shore. It was one of the darkest moments in Hong Kong's history. The people of this cathedral endured that ordeal but never stopped demonstrating the power of God's gracious love and care.

When the plague was over, a memorial stained glass window was erected in the north transept to honour two European nurses who died nursing the Chinese victims in Hong Kong. The window featured one woman looking up to Jesus and the other giving a cup to a dying man. The words on the stained

glass said “Inasmuch as you did it to one of these...” quoting Jesus’ teachings about caring for the least among us. Unfortunately, this stained-glass window didn’t survive during the Japanese occupation in WWII and is no longer on display at the cathedral.

The courage, sacrifices, and love of these two nurses are great examples for us. Today, while we are very much frustrated by the threat and impact of COVID-19, there are still much that we can do for one another. Jesus’ call to care for the least among us still rings true. While many feel isolated because of social distancing and many have grown weary because of constant fear of illness and the economic downturn, we should ask, what can we do to care for the least among us?

I pray that as a cathedral community, we will continue to be a beacon of hope and a place of God’s love. I also pray that with our faith in Christ and love for others, God will continue to shine through us. Like our forbearers 126 years ago, we will survive this pandemic and come out stronger as God’s people. God bless you all!