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## *Episcopal Endowments*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, GA**  
**Thursday in the Fourth Week of Easter**  
**A Sermon for Evensong**  
**At the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes**

*St. Paul, in First Thessalonians 2 asks his readers, "What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!"*

It is certainly an honor for Atlanta, and the south, to welcome representatives from Episcopal churches all over the country -endowed Episcopal parishes who are part of this consortium.

But I've got to tell you something. Much of the south would have no idea what we are doing today in this beautiful and highly sophisticated evensong. We are worshipping with a liturgy and style and technique that could not be more different than what we hear on the radio in our pick-em-up trucks.

For the most refined Anglicans during the last hundred years, the highpoint of our singing liturgy has probably been - what? - Sunday afternoons at 4:00: Solemn Evensong! That is our stairway, our ascent, to heaven itself! But in the south for the past hundred years, the highpoint of our singing liturgy has been Saturday night at 7:00, and the Grand Old Opry. Now that's a liturgy!

And as for what the word "endowment" means in the south: well, it's hard to see past Dolly Parton. And that's just fine with us, and for her, too. Have you actually heard her sing? It's easy to listen to her sing "The Glory Forever," "The Golden Streets of Glory." Get this. She's even sung a version of the old Led Zeppelin song, "Stairway to Heaven."

Yes, we have our endowments in the south; but they are generally not like those elsewhere around the country. One of the real differences between church life in the south, or in the Bible Belt at all, and in the more established urban centers of the country, is the presence of financial endowments.

A few of the southern churches have a useful endowment, including this fine place where we worship today, St. Luke's Church. But most of us are still on the frontier when it comes to the benefit of endowments. Every year, every season, we have to start all over again seeking the money we need. We have to earn our respect again, every year. We have to curry the favor and good will and true faith of our parishioners every year.

All of us do that to some extent, don't we? It's part of parish routine.

Now, here's the question I have for us tonight. What are we actually trying to do when we raise that money, either for our annual campaign, or for our building campaign, or for our endowment campaign?

I propose that the money part of our endowment is secondary, sort of like how the physical appearance of Dolly Parton is

secondary to her singing. This beautiful singing that we have enjoyed tonight is also an endowment, but it's not the main thing going on here.

Now, we love to show off these secondary endowments, don't get me wrong! Up at my own shop, the Cathedral of St. Philip, we are building a grand new structure, and you better believe we are going to be proud of it. We are already proud of it!

I am intrigued when I tour churches with rectors and church leaders, and notice what it is they seem to be proud of. Some folks will show me their stained glass windows. Some folks will show off their kitchen, their bells. Some folks, get this, have been proud of their modern bathrooms. (After all, this is the south!)

I had one architect, discussing his new plans, who seemed most proud of the monumental stair. Whatever else we talked about, he always returned to something called "the monumental stair." Maybe he was still listening to "Stairway to Heaven," and looking for that crown of glory!

Is this our calling in life? To raise the largest endowment? To build the most gorgeous building? To fashion a monumental stair?

In First Thessalonians, St. Paul put the question this way: "What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting?"

"Is it not you, you? Yes, yes, yes, YOU are our glory and joy!"

Glory and joy. "Doxa" and "Kara!" "Kara" means joy. But the word that Paul uses for "glory" is "doxa," from which we obviously get the word "doxology." However, the traditional sense of the word "doxa" refers to God, not humanity. There is another word that Greek typically uses for the honor that human beings give one another. (That Greek word is "high five.")

No. The word "doxa" is usually reserved for the honor and glory we humans give to God alone. Paul says something different here. He is saying that these lowly Thessalonians were his glory. These folks from Thessalonica, where he had been roughed up by a mob, and run out of the city, were his divine glory!

Now, it is meet and right that we should be proud of endowments and buildings and music and stairways. But they are not our primary calling.

Our primary calling is to find divine glory in this very community of faith that we call the Church. Yes, I'm talking about people. Yes, I'm talking about the folks we have to rub shoulders against every week, and the ones who grab our favorite parking spot. Those heretic liberals who voted that way during last summer's General Convention. Those obstinate conservatives who are threatening to leave the church. That old altar guild member who thinks she owns the altar. The junior warden who thinks he owns the grounds. These are all the people of God, the folks to whom Paul said, "You! You are our glory and our joy."

When we can say that, when we can really believe that, then two miracles occur. One is this: those folks are transformed for us. God really does transform them, and us, into a community of glory and joy. Today, in these times, there is nothing more exciting than a church of glory and joy.

That leads to the second miracle. People give their endowments to communities of glory and joy. People give their talents. People give their souls to churches of glory and joy. And people stay in those churches of glory and joy, no matter what else is going on in the world.

Those people remain with us. Even after they die, they remain with us, the church. And a few of them leave money to the church. That is the money that builds stairways to heaven and creates large endowments. That kind of endowment is sacramental: an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible, community of glory and joy.

What, then, are the "Episcopal Endowments" which each of us nurture? They are fruits of glory and joy, ripening over time. Our job is to tend that garden of people. Say to our people, You are our glory! You are our endowment! You are our

stairway to heaven! You are our music! You are our joy!

Glory!

Amen.

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Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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