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## *Saint Columba and Storms and Christ-Bearers*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by Dean Sam Candler**

Today, Tuesday, June 9, 2020, I can see gray clouds gathering overhead. No doubt, they are bringing rain. With a lot of imagination, though – a lot of it! – I can smell where the rain is coming from. With a lot of imagination, I smell salt air in the wind today, as if these clouds overhead are sent from the ocean, to blow salt air and water our way.

Yeah, I know. That takes a lot of imagination. But it's partly true. Our wind and rain this week are effects from the tropical depression that came ashore several days ago, down south. They have named the storm, Cristobal.

These tropical depressions, and hurricanes, are normal this time of year, and –when they are mild!–they perform the necessary function of bringing water our way. Our dry earth and thirsty soil need these kinds of storms – as long as they are not fierce! We always need fresh water and wind.

Today, June 9, is also the feast day of a special saint in the church, Saint Columba. Saint Columba was a man who knew the sea, and storms, too. Born in Ireland, in 521, he became a fine scholar and monk. With other monks, however, he found himself tossed and driven, and moved about by trouble; in 544 it was the notorious pestilence of Ireland that moved him. In new places, however, he simply founded new monasteries.

Columba enjoyed preaching, and was said to have had a loud, melodious voice, maybe like that of a dove. Evangelizing the druids, who were dying out, he declared, “Christ is my druid.” He became a priest in 555. Then, according to legend, on one of his missionary journeys, his boat fell into the strong winds and fury of a sea storm. The boat washed ashore on the island we now know as Iona.

On Iona, where he came ashore, Columba founded the tremendous monastery that would be responsible for converting the Picts, in Northern Britain. That land, of course, would become Scotland.

The name, Columba, means “dove,” and it is uncertain how Columba got that name. But the name, “Jonah,” in the Hebrew Scriptures, also means “dove.” Jonah, of course, is the one who was also thrown about in a storm, and even sank into the belly of a great fish, before being resurrected to new life. Columba the dove, like Jonah the dove, was able to preach after having nearly lost his life.

We, too, have been tossed about by some storms lately, haven't we? The coronavirus storm, the racism storm, the economic recession storm. These storms have thrown us into some new places, cast us upon new shores. We are in new emotional lands and new spiritual territories, maybe where we have never been before.

Following blessed Columba, and with the sign of Jonah, maybe we can learn to be spiritual in a new way, too.

*We are tossed and driven  
On this restless sea of time.  
Somber skies and howling tempests  
oft succeed a bright sunshine.  
In that land of perfect day,  
When the mists have rolled away,  
We will understand it better by and by.*

It's a great old spiritual. Contrary to what it declares, though, I don't know if we will ever really understand it by and by. We are, all of us, tossed and driven, and understanding is still a long way off. But, like Columba, we build where we have landed. Maybe some of us will construct new enterprises, like the Iona monastery, which can change the world.

But all of us, no matter where we have landed, can be bearers of Christ. All of us, no matter where we have landed, can be bringers of good news, peace and justice, wherever we are. We can all be bearers of Christ, even in a storm; that is what the name, "Cristobal," means, "Christ-bearer."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Sam Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip