



# OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

## ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

April 20, 2021

### TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

Dear friends:

“Unprecedented, extraordinary, exceptional.” These are words that we have been using unceasingly this past year to describe a uniquely challenging experience: living through a global pandemic.

The funeral of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, this past weekend connected to these words and felt very symbolic of this experience: it was spartan in its simplicity; quiet because there were so few people in attendance; poignant in its starkness; and beautiful because the faith of the man at the centre of it all shone through the liturgy, scriptures, and music.

It was a funeral for the times; carried out in sacred simplicity. It was a funeral for the times: shorn of the extras; as notable for what was missing, as for what was included – for who was included. It was a funeral for the times: everyone digging deep – most of all the now solitary royal widow – to lay hold of the assurance of her faith and the remembrance of the love that caused her grief. Grief, The Queen has told us in her own words, is the price we pay for love. “Unprecedented, extraordinary, and exceptional” might be the words we’d use to describe their 73-year union as well.

These are words we have been carrying with us – bearing with us– throughout the past 13 months. They have been our refuge. They are words of surprise. We thought they were temporary words.

However, now in the midst of a devastating third wave, complete with a new declaration of emergency and stay-at-home order, it’s dawning on us that these words are no longer transitory. They’re sticking around longer than we expected. The pandemic is sticking around longer than we expected. So, in the spirit of our Queen, it is a time for us to similarly dig deep and to lay hold of the words of scripture that speak so beautifully, movingly, and sustainingly of the endurance and perseverance of our faith – a faith that will get us through this difficult, worrisome, and weary time.

In St. Paul’s great letter to the Roman Church, he tells the people to “rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer” (Romans 12:12). For of such things comes strength.

And when we are feeling Job-like in our sufferings, the words of the letter of James resonate: "Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11).

When our love for our lockdown-mates inevitably becomes strained, the words of the first letter to the Corinthians echo in our ears: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7) and we find the strength to dig deep and bear our proximity in love and acts of tenderness.

Returning to Romans, when our spirits are low, and our sense of isolation from each other and from God weighs on us, these words speak the truth – that God never lets us go: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39).

But for me, digging deep also means leaning hard on Christ, for as St. Paul says in his letter to the church in Philippi, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

And so, may the words of scripture, and the love of God that they describe, sustain and uphold you as we endure – and triumph – over this third wave of COVID-19. And may you dig deep and discover that the Risen Christ breathes his peace on you so that we have the strength to wait with expectation.

Blessings for this Eastertide,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Niagara". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Blessings for this Eastertide,".

Bishop of Niagara