



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

The Bishop's Pentecost Message

June 5, 2022

"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."
- John 14: 26-27

Dear Friends,

I have been keeping close company with this passage from the Gospel of Saint John for some weeks now. Not on purpose but because, rather like a song that sticks with you whether you like it or not, it has been travelling with me as I contemplate our path ahead, and especially the season we are optimistically, and I sincerely hope, factually, calling 'post-COVID.' Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit will come at Pentecost seems deeply important to how we meet our present and future.

We have been contemplating how things are – what the state of the Church is – as we emerge from stress and isolation of the latest pandemic waves. This is an interesting time – full of shifting expectations and emerging opportunities. It's also a time of reckoning, recalibrating, and wondering.

So, this feels like an important time to remind you about the story we are in as disciples of the living Christ here and now. Remember how the apostles gathered in the upper room in fear of their lives, confused about what was next for them, confused about the future or even whether there was a future for their beliefs, and their chosen family of faith. They were a small handful of people. A small handful of people that over time, with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, also began to understand what story they were in.

They were in the sacred story of God's mission of love in this world. From Genesis to Revelation, they were in the story of God's love for this world – and God's desire to draw all people to himself in love. And once they had hold of that realization, they were off. They were unstoppable; a people mobilizing for mission.

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That history is important for us to rehearse in this moment, and to lay hold of its hope and potential right now. For we too are a people mobilizing for mission, ignited by the irresistible love of Jesus and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

So, if you are worried about your parish – the people, the finances, the building – I need you to remember this – and this is a spiritual discipline my friends, and I mean this with all my heart: put your trust in God and in the leading of the Holy Spirit. We will greet this uncertain time together with confidence that the Spirit is leading us through – because we know what story we’re in too. There’s such a power in knowing what story you’re in. We are the Church of Jesus Christ – and we have a mission in this world: called to life and compelled to love such as we are.

Now, we have to set about the listening for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and asking for the gift of courage and all the other resources it will take to accomplish the earthly mission of the Church. Many of you are undertaking this important discernment work through our [parish Mission Action Planning process](#), and many more of you will set about this work later in the fall.

Lest this all seem like Pollyanna thinking, let me remind you of this: from that small handful of imperfect folks – people just like us, up against enormous obstacles – grew a movement so strong, so compelling, so transformative that it’s still a force for seismic change in our world – far more seismic than a pandemic. God is bigger than this pandemic. The Church is alive and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we move forward in trust.

Today, we celebrate this amazing reality. May the Holy Spirit breathe her peace into our beloved diocese as we welcome her presence today. Happy Pentecost!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Niagara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Right Reverend Susan J.A. Bell
Bishop of Niagara