

## *The Charge*

# **THE HOUR HAS COME**

**The hour has come**, Jesus tells us in the Gospel reading appointed for the memorial of Ignatius of Antioch, which we celebrate today.

The hour has come for Christ to be glorified and the hour has come for the Church, which is the Body of Christ, to fall as a grain of wheat into the ground where it must die and where, in dying, it will bear much fruit.

First, then, sisters and brothers, the hour has come for Christ to be glorified. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Christ is glorified. He is glorified in God and in the Spirit. He must be glorified, in consequence, in our worship, in good times and in bad. For the God of all the earth is *enthroned upon the praises of Israel* (Ps 22.3). Every day we serve a dying yet glorified Christ, a dying but risen Lord. This truth, Christ risen and glorified, commands the hope that will empower the Body of Christ, still on its earthly pilgrimage, to die that it might give life to the world, and it too be rebirthed anew.

Secondly, then, and the principal theme of this Episcopal Charge, is that the hour has come for the Church to suffer, to die, **and, in dying, to bear much fruit**. What does that dying look like? Following in the footsteps of Bishop Ignatius, a strange man who points us, his over-eagerness for martyrdom notwithstanding, to the truth that the Church must die if it is to bear fruit. Here is the death, here is the sacrificial gift that weighs upon my heart, that has weighed upon my heart these last two years that I have served as your Bishop. And here too is the commanding hope of fruitfulness that makes me believe that faithfulness in a hard time will lead to glory, to a better future for our neighbourhoods, our city, and all whom we serve. Now is the hour to build, serve, and sacrifice for a better future.

Let me explain.

First, the hour has come for the Church to recognize that it cannot be “the settler’s Church. I acknowledge with gratitude and humility that we gather at a time when indigenous Anglicans are moving forward with self-determination under the episcopal leadership of Archbishop Mark MacDonald, the Indigenous Bishops’ Group, the Anglican Circle of Indigenous Peoples. Rupert’s Land, Diocese and Province, must and, under my leadership, will continue the work of repenting – repenting in real and practical and costly, sacrificial ways - for the spiritual harms and damages we inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples, especially at Indian Residential Schools. It is time for institutional arrogance to die, like an old grain in the ground, to give new birth to genuine leadership amongst all peoples, particularly those indigenous folk, and others, who have been silenced in the past, to flourish and be heard. We understand that the song, the dance, the pipe, the colours, the medicines and the drum do not conflict with Christian teaching, rather they provide a local context and cultural theology in which we might more fully hear God’s call in this time and place. More than that, we see a strong and vital expression of the Anglican Church rising with Indigenous Peoples, rising in its education for Lay and Ordained ministry, rising in its regional episcopal oversight. The Indigenous Church offers a vibrant illustration of mission in community. If they will lead, as your Bishop I promise that I will follow. **Now is the hour.**

I acknowledge that the Church in Rupert’s Land has been the perpetrator of bullying, systemic racism, prejudicial behaviour and privilege amidst many people, not only indigenous. We have grieved the mind and heart of Christ, and we must be held accountable for our behaviour through the generations. Through our baptism, and in our proclaimed Marks of Mission, we are called to justice, to kindness, to walk humbly with God in this present time. The Body of Christ, as biblically illustrated, is here to stand-up to bullies, challenge unjust structures, and proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near for ALL PEOPLE. Our voice must be heard as we live-out our identity in the One Body of Christ. And the Indigenous Church among others must and will lead us if we will die to ourselves. Now is the hour for the Non-Privileged Church to be fruitful. If we will die for the

sake of the whole Church, we will be part of the fruit that is bourn from having died.

Secondly, the leading of the Indigenous Church, reputable science, dismantling racism groups, and all who act for peace and justice should be having a real impact upon the issues of Climate action and Earth Care, global greed, and human trafficking among many ills that are destroying this planet. Vulnerable and impoverished people around the world understand and suffer from unfolding catastrophes more profoundly than those of privilege. It is crucially important that as we proclaim God's kingdom we become acutely aware of our interdependency with God in all creation. The human family is called upon to be stewards this world, but some of us have done this badly. We have grieved God to God's own face, giving thanks for the spoils WE CREATED. God calls the Church through the sacraments to be a sacrament, to lead the human family in genuinely caring for the Earth, a visible sign that the Kingdom of God has come near. The entire human family, and fossil-fuel-dependent and overly affluent Canadians in particular, must make radical sacrifices if the earth is to become whole again, fruitful again in the way God intended. COVID 19 in particular has made me see more clearly God calling the Body of Christ to activity, mission, and radical love, and we are responding. This is the hour to follow the wisdom of our ancestors to reclaim the earth for sustainable human and non-human life.

Thirdly, I acknowledge that these Extraordinary Days of COVID 19 have caused a ground-swell of deep lament. St Paul speaking on our behalf, and that of the world, tells us that the Earth is groaning in labour pains, in great and long travail; the Spirit laments in sighs, too deep for word. We are that lament, and we are those who acknowledge that God, Christ, and Holy Spirit are in the midst of the very lament we utter. And out of this lament Christ, the incarnate presence in creation, rises and engages us with God in the care and compassion we have for others in the world. Empathy draws us more nearly and dearly to the epicenter of the pandemic to offer ourselves, our buildings and structures - in fact die to self and offer all that we are – to dedicate ourselves to the fruitful care of our neighbours, our friends and our enemies. In every generation of the Church Christ

rises with new hospitals, new schools, better international protections, and now, finally, perhaps with a Guaranteed Basic income for the citizens of the world. This is what it means to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is close at hand, to proclaim that the Body of Christ must again fall as a grain of wheat, fall into the earth and die, that it might bear much fruit. This present epidemic shouts to us, to any who have ears to hear, that now is hour for decisive action, for deep world-changing sacrifice on the part of the affluent: that all the earth and all its creatures might know a better future. Now is the hour for a commanding hope.

Let me return to the Gospel appointed for this commemoration. It makes a most compelling case for us to own our identity in the Body of Christ. NOW is the time for the Son of Man to be glorified. And a grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die, to prepare the new life. The disciples of past generations, and particularly through indigenous cultures around the globe knew this stuff: they understood life cycles, seasonal changes, birth pains and deliveries. Present western culture ideas, especially those of the baby boomer generation like me will do well to pay attention to wisdom of the ages.

The **health and wellness of the Body of Christ** depends greatly upon that which we allow to die, and that which we nurture and foster into life. Much like Ignatius, we need to depend upon relationships within the whole Church, and indeed the whole human family, to hear, understand and act upon the calls of God. More succinctly, if we are not prepared to reach far past ourselves, into the rich harvest God has prepared, we should not expect our Churches to grow, flourish and minister.

**The health of the Church** depends upon all members being fully engaged in the Body, bringing our EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT, learning every day, forging new relationships every day, greeting Christ in EVERY person we meet every day, reckoning that God is calling us toward death, and resourcing those who follow every day, and asking us to be midwives for the new birthing of creation every day.

These activities look like Jesus of the Bible; they roll-out in culture as something to be trusted even in the midst of a climate of suspicion. These actions say something very different from other social institutions about the value of human beings, justice and relationship; they make clear that you and I are ready to

engage the world's suffering at a moment's notice - no judgement, no guile, just the love of God because the kingdom of God has come near. We have been trained throughout our life in Christ for this very moment. We are exactly what God expects and needs right now. Now is the hour. Christ is glorified and on our way to a share in that glory, we, like Christ, must die in order to bear fruit.

Synod delegation, I am honoured to be one in your presence and Body this day. You are the noble crowd of Christian witnesses nurtured, trained and selected for this duty, responsibility and joy in not only representing the local Church, but empowered and engaged to ensure **the health and wellness of the whole Church**. While bound to our duty to respect the civil and ecclesial restrictions upon us presently, we are bound also to God's call through Baptism and Eucharist to faithfully live out our duties in the Body of Christ. Although we have had to be clever in devising new ways of being the Church and carrying-out ministry and mission, we have also witnessed various parts of our institution and gathering ways that require maintenance, or over-hauling, or perhaps even allowing the grain to fall to the ground so new life can take root.

Indigenous and non-indigenous Ministry Developers, Archdeacons and District Deans, and many faithful Lay program and group leaders join with me in expecting you and calling you, members of this delegation, to lead local communities in the following ways:

- implementing regular continuing education for ALL disciples
- participate in Diocesan educational events, mission days, book studies, deanery days
- facilitate an ongoing conversation about what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ, expectations, responsibilities, joys and fears in your parish

- lead by example: challenge and oppose bullying, systemic racism, and prejudicial behaviour, especially in your parish setting
- start discussions in your parish regarding life cycles – researching and teaching how local resources and disciples can best be utilized in proclaiming that the kingdom has come near
- equipping the disciples with the tools to make new relationships. Teach the disciples to be the catalyst for church growth, and mentors in new member's education.

In conversations with you I have found the person of Christ and the calling of God. I have heard great lament, sadness, but also joy in rehearsing the Gospel, great curiosity in this profoundly liminal time, hope in the risen Christ, who is the head of that Body of which we are members. I know that you and I are yearning to be better equipped as disciples of Jesus. I know too, and I share, your sad resignation in the face of inevitable change. It feels sometimes like dying.

But we face the world together as a collection of parishes, missions and special ministries, generously sharing gifts for ministry and mission. I am humbled in the presence of laity and clergy extending themselves, going beyond past expectations, to proclaim by word and action that the kingdom has come near.

Parishes, missions and special ministries are already sent peoples, sent into God's mission field; Diocesan staff and leaders know that God's mission is discerned, empowered and realized for mission and ministry at the very place we are sent. the wider communities and neighbourhoods of the world. I believe that all skills, gifts and talents the Church requires are already present in the Church, so we must continually reflect on how we share these resources. You and I share leadership and are complemented by the leadership of each other and those around us; our identity as Anglican/Episcopal Christians is built in part upon these traits. As Anglicans we need to be free to explore, have conversations - disciple to disciple, parish to parish, deanery to deanery - learning one another's tested and

good practices, dreaming new dreams, lamenting that which has fallen away, and yearning for what lies ahead.

In conclusion, I want to assure you that in the days to come I will focus much of my work, educational endeavor and effort in nurturing and growing healthy parishes, missions and special ministries, as I believe that is the best way I can ensure **the health and wellness of the Body of Christ, as it is propelled into the world in which God is already at work.** I have experienced the complete joy and benefit when we have worked together, and I have known the sorrow that comes when we have shut one another out, our relationships, one with another, are vital as each parish brings gifts for ministry and mission unique to itself, perhaps more abundant than we might think. Our mutual care and respect for one another ensures that God's call to mission is experienced from Lake St Martin, MB to the US border, from Church of the Good Shepherd, Atikokan, ON, to St John's Pilot Mound MB. You are the principal expression of the Diocese of Rupert's Land, and I am here to help it flourish.

This is the hour for Christ to be glorified in our midst, as he is glorified in the eternal life of that Trinitarian love that courses through God's most abundant, fruitful, life-giving creation. Now is the hour, living in the shadow of his blinding glory, for the Body of Christ to fall like a grain of wheat into the earth that it might bear the fruit of sacrifice. This is good work that rests upon a commanding hope. Remember what the Psalmist said to us today: *Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.* And thus the apostle tells the truth when he says that nothing *will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*