



Diocese of the Virgin Islands
(Episcopal Church / Anglican)

The Episcopal Church of the Virgin Islands, Incorporated

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P.O. Box 7488, St. Thomas, VI 00801 340-776-1797 *Fax 340-777-8485

Office of the Bishop

bpambrose@edotvi.org

**PASTORAL MESSAGE FOR THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SEPTEMBER 13, 2020**

**TO THE CLERGY, PEOPLE OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND OUR VIRTUAL
VIEWERS AND LISTENERS ON RADIO AND READERS OF THE DAILY NEWS**

***God is faithful, and will not let us be tested beyond our strength, but with the
testing God will also provide the way out so that we may be able to endure it.'***
1 Corinthians 10:13

Finding ourselves between a rock and a hard place is a common statement, or between the devil and the deep blue sea. Yet, even in the midst of such a situation there can be a way of escape. This week we have such an example from the word of God to comfort and to give us hope as we face the challenges COVID-19 has imposed on us. As we continue on this journey through COVID-19 and the hurricane season, many of us may experience periods of anxiety. The restrictions are taking their toll on many mentally and emotionally. We can't take a ferry even to one of our neighboring islands. Most of our normal actions and activities are dictated in an effort to contain and eventually eradicate this dreaded pandemic.

During times like these, humanity needs a compass and guide to help us navigate our way through this pandemic. We need something and someone to give us some assurance that, in spite of the doom and gloom accompanying our present journey, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Actually, the light of God is with us guiding us through the darkness of these times toward the better days God has in store for us.

Some governments likened the pandemic to an invading army marching through our lives and disrupting our way of life. While this may be where we are, we can be assured that we are not journeying alone. It is not total darkness after all. In Psalm 139, the Psalmist tells us, "If we say, surely the darkness will cover us, and the light around us turn to night, darkness is not dark to God, the night is as bright as the day, darkness and light to God are both alike."

*See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth,
I tell you of them. Isaiah 42:9*

When the enemy went after the fleeing Children of Israel, God provided a pillar of cloud that kept the enemy from destroying the lives of the pursued. The cloud was there in the darkness to give light in the day and a pillar of fire lit the darkness by night, one did not come near the other. In the mist of this pandemic, God is sending us messages that will encourage us as we journey to the wholeness prepared for those who believe and follow on.

My sisters and brothers, this is not a battle that we can fight in our own strength. It was not for those emancipated from Egypt. Only as we clothe ourselves in the righteousness of God by reading and by meditating on God's word, and only as we understand the appropriateness of God's word for our time, will we find ourselves equipped to withstand the fiery ordeals with which we are faced. We will need to clothe ourselves in the full armor of God. That is the weapon we can use to enable us to endure the challenges of this present time. Only as we hide the word of God in our hearts will we be enabled to face the challenges with a certain confidence that we shall overcome; deliverance is on the way! Each day that we are alive, we should feel more assured that victory is on our side. God did not bring us this far to leave us.

My friends, we are living in challenging times. It is risky, downright dangerous to go out without certain precautions and protections. Our first weapon for these times and all seasons should be to know the will of God for God's people and to cover ourselves in the word. Jesus told us that He came that we may have life and to have it abundantly. So, during this present time our minds need to be fixed on the abundant life promised to all believers. Yes, go through this awful period, with the assurance that God is with us and will see us through to a better day.

Therefore, let our minds be fixed on things that are eternal and let our actions reflect on the one who is traveling with us on this journey. We should employ whatever methods necessary to help us keep our minds focused on eternal truths while we face the temporary challenges of this time. This is not something too hard for us to do. It can be as simple as singing our favorite psalm, or hymn or spiritual song, or having a melody deep down in our souls. Allow the melody to percolate through our minds and radiate from our faces. May our melody be a recurring theme throughout the day! Don't forget to share it with others. Our sharing may encourage others to search their inner reservoir for their favored comforting and encouraging words or theme from the Lord to recite or sing along the way. As the hymn writer states, tell out my soul the greatness of the

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Lord, Let Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice; In God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.

While we have no control over the pandemic or the hurricane season, our positive actions can help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our community, and our early preparedness can help to mitigate the damages if a hurricane were to pass our way. God is faithful and will not let us be tested beyond our strength, but with the testing God will provide the way out so that we may be able to endure it. 'All things are possible to those who believe.' Amen.

Grace and Peace,



The Rt. Rev. E. Ambrose Gumbs, D.D.
Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of the Virgin Islands

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