

HONOURING THE PAST, EMPOWERING THE PRESENT, INSPIRING THE FUTURE
Black History Month Address at
St Mark the Evangelist Anglican Church
Sunday, February 15th, 2026
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Good morning Church Family; it is an honour to be with you all today!

I extend a very special thank you to **Rev Dr. Mary-Cate Garden** for sharing her pulpit today and to **Joseph and the Black History Month (BHM) Committee** for inviting me back to address you as you celebrate BHM.

As we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the sacred work of our collective grief as a nation. It is possible for these two things to co-exist – we can celebrate one thing and grieve another. As a nation, we mourn with the community of Tumbler Ridge, BC, in the heartbreaking mass shooting and loss that they experienced this past week. We stand together in compassion, knowing that God has provided us with community so that we can comfort and hold each other up. Allow His truth to comfort you, knowing that we never walk alone, that He is our refuge and strength.

As I prepared to be with you this year, I looked back at last year's message on the theme of strength through unity, reminding us that **“unity embraces diversity to create a stronger whole.”**

This year's theme expands on that message as it remembers and honours that diversity, empowering us for the “now” and inspiring a hope for the future.

As your first BHM speaker, Sophia, shared with you, those *“are not just ideas but responsibilities that we carry together.”*

Last year, I mentioned that each year, Heritage Canada devotes resources to celebrate and promote BH, creating a theme and providing tools for the community to use in their efforts. I hope that you’ve availed yourself with those resources, as it no doubt inspires your committee’s planning.

Directly from Heritage Canada’s website, we read:

*“This year’s theme **“30 Years of Black History Month: Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations — From Nation Builders to Tomorrow’s Visionaries.”***

celebrates three decades of Black History Month in Canada by highlighting the enduring contributions of Black Canadians across time. It acknowledges the foundational role of nation builders—those who fought for civil rights, advanced social justice, and shaped Canada’s cultural and political landscape. At the same time, it looks forward to tomorrow’s visionaries, the emerging leaders, innovators, and changemakers who are redefining excellence in every field.

By framing the theme around “Black Brilliance Across Generations”, we emphasize continuity, resilience, and progress. It invites reflection on historical achievements while inspiring future possibilities, reinforcing that Black history is not only about the past but also about shaping Canada’s future. This approach fosters intergenerational dialogue, strengthens community pride, and aligns with the broader goal of equity and inclusion.

The theme also resonates with the milestone of 30 years, making it a moment to honour legacy, celebrate present contributions, and empower the next generation—a narrative that is both commemorative and forward-looking.”

Thirty years after Jean Augustine, the first Black woman elected to Canadian Parliament, whose motion to recognize February as BHM was unanimously passed, we are here at St Mark’s parish in Ottawa celebrating BH together. It reminds of the intentionality required to carry this legacy forward, together, because as Councillor Rawlston King said to you last week, “*our humanity is bound up in one-another’s*”, not in one person doing the work, but in all of us doing it together.

So today, as we gather in the presence of God during this Black History Month, we come with hearts full of gratitude—gratitude for where God has brought us from, gratitude for His sustaining power today, and gratitude for the hope He plants in every generation. I want to look at our theme, **Honouring the Past, Empowering the Present, Inspiring the Future**, not just a reflection of history but also, as a spiritual calling.

Honouring the Past

Your Epistle reading today from the apostle Peter in **2 Peter 1:16–21**, reminds us that our faith is **not** built on “cleverly devised stories,” but on *eyewitness testimony*—on truth, on lived experience, on the powerful acts of God revealed through history. Peter says they heard the voice of God and saw the majesty of Christ with their own eyes. And because of that, he urges the church to pay attention to this truth “as to a light shining in a dark place.”

In the same way, when we honour Black history, we are not honouring myths or distant legends. We are honouring truth—truth lived out by men and women who trusted God through trials, injustice, and uncertainty. Their stories are a light for us today.

We honour the approximately 3,000 Black Loyalists who sought freedom in Nova Scotia. We honour the courage of those who travelled the Underground Railroad, that saw an estimated 30,000-40,000 fugitive slaves through Eastern Canada, believing that God had more for them than bondage. We honour communities like Africville in Nova Scotia, Hogan’s Alley in Vancouver, and Little Burgundy in Montreal —places where faith, family, and resilience flourished even when society pushed them to the margins.

And we honour the spiritual giants—preachers, mothers, fathers, musicians, teachers—who held onto God’s promises when the world offered little else. Their faith is part of our inheritance.

Empowering the Present

Peter goes on to say that Scripture is “a lamp shining in a dark place.” That call is for us, the Church, to carry that lamp today.

Empowering the present means recognizing that God has placed gifts, callings, and purpose in Black Canadians across this nation. It means celebrating the image of God reflected in Black creativity, Black leadership, and Black faith.

But empowerment also means responsibility:

- It means standing for justice.
- It means speaking truth in love.
- It means creating spaces where every person—especially our children—knows they are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Just as the prophets spoke by the Spirit of God, we too must speak and act by the Spirit—lifting one another up, advocating for equity, and building communities where dignity is honoured, and hope is nurtured.

Inspiring the Future

Peter tells us that prophecy never came by human will, but “men and women spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” That same Spirit is still carrying us today.

Inspiring the future means believing that God is not finished with us. It means telling our children that their history is rich, their identity is blessed, and their future is filled with possibility. It means planting seeds of faith, courage, and vision that will live on, long after we are gone.

We imagine a future where Black stories are woven into the fabric of Canadian identity—not only in February, but every day of the year. We imagine a future where the next generation rises with confidence, knowing that God has called them for such a time as this. We imagine a future shaped not by fear, but by faith.

A Call to the Church

As God's Church, let us commit to:

- **Honouring the past** with truth, gratitude, and humility.
- **Empowering the present** with love, justice, and Spirit-led action.
- **Inspiring the future** with hope, mentorship, and unwavering faith.

May we be a community that remembers well, lives boldly, and dreams courageously.

Black history is a testimony of God's faithfulness. Black present is a witness of God's power. Black future is a declaration of God's promise.

Let us pray

Gracious and Eternal God,

We come before You with hearts full of thanksgiving. As we reflect on Black History Month, we remember that You are the God of every generation— the God who carried our ancestors, the God who strengthens us today, and the God who holds our future in Your hands.

Lord, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. Just as Peter declared that our faith is not built on “cleverly devised stories,” we stand on the solid foundation of lived testimony— the testimony of Your power, Your justice, and Your faithfulness throughout history. Help us to pay attention to this truth as to a light shining in dark places.

We honour the past today, O God. We remember those who walked through oppression with unshakable faith. We remember the mothers and fathers who prayed, persevered, and believed in freedom. We remember the communities that built, created, worshipped, and hoped even when the world tried to silence

their voices. Thank You for their courage. Thank You for their resilience. Thank You for the legacy they left for us.

We ask for Your power in the present. Holy Spirit, empower us to walk in unity, justice, and love. Strengthen Black communities across Canada— in our churches, our schools, our workplaces, and our homes. Let every person know they are made in Your image, called by Your purpose, and gifted for such a time as this. Make us a church that lifts up the weary, celebrates Black excellence, and stands boldly for righteousness.

And Lord, inspire our future. Carry us forward by Your Spirit, just as You carried the prophets of old. Plant dreams in our children that no system can limit. Raise up leaders, thinkers, artists, innovators, and peacemakers who will shape a future filled with hope. May the next generation walk in confidence, knowing that their story is rooted in Your story and their future is anchored in Your promise.

God, make us faithful stewards of the past, courageous witnesses in the present, and hopeful visionaries for the future.

We give You all the glory— for what You have done, for what You are doing, and for what You will do.

In Jesus' mighty name we pray, **Amen.**