

A Letter to the Nation from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York

04/11/2020

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have invited the nation to join them in prayer, in a message encouraging ‘calm, courageous and compassionate’ responses to the difficulties of the second national lockdown in England.

Dear Friends,

These are deeply challenging and difficult times for us all. When we are surrounded by fear and suffering, it can be hard to feel hopeful. This coming winter feels like it will be longer and darker than usual.

There is a story in the Bible where Jesus and his disciples are caught in a storm. The disciples are understandably terrified as the wind and waves threaten to overpower them. ‘Why are you so afraid?’, Jesus asks. This year, we too have been caught in a storm which often feels overwhelming. And yet we can look to Jesus, in the boat with us, who calms the storm and comforts us in our fear.

We are writing to share our belief that whoever you are, and whatever you happen to believe, you are loved by God. Beyond measure. We also want you to know that we are praying for you, particularly asking that Christ’s love will comfort us, calm our fears, and lead our nation and our world through this terrible pandemic. Starting this week, we have asked every church to pray each day at 6pm. We invite you to join with us. You’ll be able to find simple resources on the Church of England website and social media channels.

There are three other responses that we want to encourage everyone to consider -

First, let’s be *calm*. By only buying what we need and not hoarding, or by reaching out to our neighbours as we did during the first lockdown, we can be stronger together in ways that are impossible if we go it alone. When things go wrong - as they always will with such complex challenges - let us look for good and right ways forward together.

Secondly, let’s be *courageous*. There are many reasons to be fearful at the moment, but the story of Christ calming the waves calls us to give our fears to Jesus and have faith in Him. The British willingness just to get on with things is one of our very best characteristics – let us not be paralysed by fear. We will all need each other’s courage in the months to come.

Thirdly, let’s be *compassionate*. So many of us are holding so much pain - our own and the pain of those we love. We will need to be gentle, kind and patient with each other. In the first wave we showed we are a nation of compassion and kindness. Let’s dig deep and keep that love for our neighbours strong in this second time of struggle.

Even though there is much darkness around us, there are also many points of light in the weeks ahead. This Sunday is Remembrance Day. As we remember the courage and sacrifice of those who gave everything for this nation in war, we are also reminded of the possibility for hope after destruction, of new life after suffering. In the coming weeks, there are great religious ceremonies. For Hindus, Sikhs and Jains there is Diwali, the festival of light. Sikhs will celebrate the birth of Guru Nanak. The Jewish community will observe Hanukkah. Many Muslim communities have just celebrated Eid-e-Milad, the anniversary of the birth of Muhammad.

Soon it will be Christmas. At his birth Jesus was also called Emmanuel. It’s a word that appears in lots of carols. It means ‘God is with us’. And this is the message of Christmas: in Jesus, God is with us, sharing our darkness and our struggles, bringing comfort and joy. It is the source of our hope. As the Bible says: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:5) Let us shine in the darkness of this winter.

May God bless you and keep you, and all those you love.

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York