



FAMILY VALUES

It's not just what you do, but who you are, that matters this Christmas, says Justin Welby



➤ We are almost at the end of unpacking after three moves in five years. To be accurate, it's actually about six moves in five years because at one point we were living in two places and moving to two places with some stuff going into storage. But here we are in what is – I have to admit – a wonderful place to live. I am talking, of course, about Lambeth Palace. We don't live in the whole thing, just a flat at the top, but every corridor is full of pictures of dead, previous archbishops (mostly dead, anyway) and the history falls out of the walls at you. It is an extraordinary privilege.

One of the things about moving to a new job as a clergyperson is that you have to do 12 months in the job before you really know what it's about. Until you've had at least one Easter and one Christmas, there is still always the likelihood of a surprise in the way things are done. Once we get through Christmas, I will have done a year and can relax a little into understanding the pattern.

For once, Christmas will not necessarily be by far and away the busiest time of the year. Even though there



are the normal load of carol services and the normal sense of dreaming (never mind singing 'Hark the Herald'), which becomes more and more powerful as the weeks run into Christmas. But there is also the Christmas message that has to be prepared, and the Christmas article (of which this is only one example).

Two things are particularly on my mind. This latest move was from Bishop Auckland in County Durham (and the other half of the family on the edge of Toxteth in Liverpool) down to central London. Both my wife and I are Londoners, but we left in 1989, when I went off for ordination training, and have thus been away for almost a quarter of a century.

The change since then is incredible. The city is busier, and richer, and on a completely different scale from the one we left at the end of the 1980s. I don't just mean the traffic, but the whole sense of bustle and, above all, of internationalism in a way that makes it even more exciting than it used to be.

But it is also a very different place to all the other parts of the country in which we have been living in the intervening years. There seem to be



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more resources, and we have come back into a world in which we meet up with a lot of people involved in the treasury profession, whether from the banks or elsewhere. For most of the year since I was last writing this article, I have been heavily involved in the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards and I am still actively taking part in debates in parliament on banking reform and the structure of banking regulation.

That all seems very academic, but my first Christmas thought that comes out of it is that it needs to tie in to a sense of vocation. At the very heart of Christian belief about Christmas is the sense of God reaching out to humanity in order to offer an invitation to a life full of purpose and a life full of love.

In some ways it is easier to see that away from London than in the incredible busyness and distraction of this great city. Meeting large numbers of financial professionals, especially from the banking industry, one is reminded how incredibly hard people work. The question has to be: for what purpose?

I think there needs to be a renewed sense of purpose, so that what we do today somehow connects up with the

rest of humanity, especially across the country. Otherwise, it is in danger of being just self-regarding, even just London-regarding. Following on from the idea that God reaches out to humanity, at the heart of Christian belief, is the love with which He reaches out. It binds us into a single family, a body with accountability and responsibility for one another, to ensure we all flourish.

The second thing that is on my mind is looking forward. Inevitably, in a job such as this, the most likely next step is retirement. That concentrates the mind. But the job also has the most extraordinary privileges in the kind of things I get to do. In late October, I officiated at the baptism of HRH Prince George. All baptisms are wonderful, because they have this great sense of looking forward. There is something particularly appropriate when thinking about Christmas to reflect on a baptism of someone who, in due course, will be King. It was a wonderful occasion, as they usually are – full of joy and laughter and celebration. At all baptisms, I tend at the time to wonder what this child will do and be.

In this case one knows what he will do, but *what* will he be?

That is the question that the baby born in a manger at Bethlehem asks each of us. The answer is not set in stone. It's not determined simply by our birth, or our upbringing, or our achievements. We can do all kinds of things. The challenge to me as I come to my first Christmas in this job is not to ask what will I do, but what kind of person will I be and become? That is a question for each of us regardless of where we are. The financial services industry has enormous power, and incredible capacity for good and ill. The past years have seen a massive change in culture, which gives great hope for its impact on the wider economy and on the whole of society. Whether that potential is realised depends not just on what we do, but on what we are.

Have a very happy holiday and a wonderful New Year. ♥

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