

{ CHRISTMAS MESSAGE }

JUSTIN WELBY

Love matters more than ever in a time of crisis



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Disasters are always more interesting than successes. In a sense this is because it's easier to learn lessons from disasters: we see what went wrong and try to avoid the same thing ourselves. There is probably also an element of *schadenfreude*, a relief that it happened to someone else and not to us. Managing disasters, turning bad situations around and handling reputational damage is one of the key aspects of risk management, if one is sensible.

The reality of a world that is full of human beings who are at best fallible, and often prone to making wrong choices deliberately, is that there will be regular disasters. In my days as a corporate treasurer, my assumption was always that what could go wrong, would. Our financial structure needed to be robust enough to prevent people asking for their money back at the exact moment when we were least able to deliver it.

But even this fairly extreme belt and braces – and rather Eeyorish – view of solvency and liquidity risk does not always succeed. Commodity prices may fall and extractive companies or producers suddenly find they cannot sell at anything like the price they expected. There can be strikes, natural disasters or other events of that kind. Or there simply may be someone else, inside or outside the company, who is determined to do the wrong thing – or couldn't care less whether they act rightly or wrongly.

For me, the past year has been a remarkable education. When I started this very strange job, effectively on 21 March 2013, I committed to visiting all of the other 37 provinces of the Anglican Communion (the group of churches of which the Church of England is a part, existing in 165 countries, with roughly

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80 million members) by the end of 2014. Because these were pastoral visits and not simply business overviews, my wife Caroline and I went together. The journey has taken us from the riches of Washington, DC to the horrors of the South Sudanese civil war, in the midst of the fighting area, and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the time of writing this (the beginning of November), I look back at a recent visit to the Province of West Africa, which includes Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, as well as other countries in the region. They are struggling with ebola.

Wherever we have gone, we have found people dealing effectively with crises. It is immensely inspiring to see such large numbers putting their lives on the line out of love for God and for their neighbour. Two examples cross my mind. In the South Sudan, the Anglican archbishop called publicly for reconciliation, despite the fact that this put him at high risk, both with his own people, some of whom felt

betrayed, and with the enemy, who simply saw him as a figure to be attacked. In Pakistan, the equivalent of the archbishop goes into Taliban-controlled areas, not only loving other Christians and his neighbours, but even his enemies.

I have had my share of crisis management this year. At times it has been successful, and at other times it has failed. As we all know, the reality is that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and in very large global organisations, the eating and the digestion may not show results for a decade or two. Yet manage we must, and many reading this will have faced unexpected crises themselves.

I go into Christmas with the knowledge of the Christian belief that in the greatest crisis of all, the separation of human beings from God, His answer was to make himself as vulnerable as a baby, to come to us in human form, share our suffering, bear the weight of our wrongdoing and offer us the hope of life. Whatever the crises are, in Christ they are transformed. ♦