

{ CHRISTMAS MESSAGE }

JUSTIN WELBY

Love matters more than ever in a time of crisis



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The past couple of weeks before writing this (in late November) have been so dark and terrible as to change the whole tone of what one wants to say in a Christmas letter.

When I first started thinking about this, I was planning a fairly light-hearted commentary on what has been an extraordinary year in many ways. We should still be light-hearted, and laugh and rejoice and celebrate at Christmas. Christmases had laughter even during World War II. Tragedy and human evil should not prevent us celebrating delight and human good.

Yet even when our immediate experiences are full of light, we have to be aware of the dark background. It is one of those extraordinary features of life, in my experience, that great world events break in and change one's perspective very rapidly. The challenge is to put them where they ought to be; to adapt one's life properly, and to be neither complacent nor fearful. Having lived in Paris for five years, and still having many friends there, the grief of the attacks on a place that I love, amid people who were just enjoying themselves, is profound.

Inevitably, all those who read *The Treasurer*, and therefore likely to be involved in the financial markets, have to deal with the outcomes of Paris – not only at a human level, with grief and sympathy and sorrow and anger, but at a professional level.

There is nothing wrong with that. We expect it of those involved in facing terrorism, and we should expect it of ourselves. It is not cold-hearted to work out how to do our job better in the light of the new situation in Europe that we face, any more than it is cold-hearted for

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Place de la République square in Paris, covered in tributes to the 130 people who lost their lives in the terrorist attack on the French capital on 13 November

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the emergency services to seek to be as professional as possible. Grief and sorrow are proper and essential. Compassion and sympathy are inextricably part of anyone who is fully human. But so is a desire to respond properly.

If our societies are so consumed with fear that they cease to function, not only in day-to-day human relationships, but also in the realities of business, then evil conquers.

A friend of mine has lived for the past 20 years in a part of the world that has been at war for all that time, and has seen one of his own children die as a result. He was talking to me recently about how to live in such a situation. He runs a church, with no resources, with shell holes in one wall, and with fear a constant reality. When I asked how he responded to the huge and inescapable demands around him, he replied: "I do what I can, not what I can't, and leave the rest to God."

I think that is one of the sanest and healthiest attitudes to such trauma that I've ever heard. To fret over what we can't manage is not only diverted energy, but also a way to despair and to fear. To handle

what we can, with all the resources and strength and courage that we can muster, demonstrates our humanity, our wisdom and our trust in others, or even in God.

At Christmas we enjoy family time together. In that way I am particularly fortunate to have a large family, and to be able to enjoy love, teasing and laughter, serious conversation and hilarious absurdity. My experience was not always that, and so I relish it even more.

Yet I always remember that at the heart of Christian faith is the belief that God came to take a fully human life, not in strength and majesty, but in weakness and vulnerability. God so emptied himself in Jesus that he could only do what he could do, and had to leave the rest alone.

He did that, as one early Christian bishop put it, so that by becoming like us, he could open the way for us to become like him.

My prayer and hope for all readers is to have a wonderful Christmas, whatever their faith – to celebrate the good and to see off fear through the exercise of all the skills and gifts that they have. ♥