

Dear friends

We are very much used to New Years' messages on television.

On the first day of the year there are several media stars who like to wish us a happy New Year. Among this tangle of messages there is just this one that stands out every year and is worth recording along with all other festive television programmes that you may like to watch later. This outstanding and inspiring New Year's message doesn't come from a television celebrity but from the Archbishop of Canterbury who, each year on 15th January, on the BBC, brings a deep, challenging and hopeful New Year's message.

Last year Justin Welby spoke of reconciliation as he remembered the bombing of Coventry Cathedral in 1940. He linked the need for reconciliation and peace with recent conflicts all over the world. Also in our country there is a need for a change for the better in our relationships with each other. We should try to gain back this spirit of generosity and hospitality that we seem to have lost. Is it the pessimistic economic prospect that makes people selfish and self-protective? Maybe it is. History scholars have demonstrated that there is a causal link between economic recession and protectionism.

For my New Year's wish for you I'd like to borrow Justin Welby's words from his message last year:

"Living well together despite our differences, offering hospitality to the stranger and those in exile, with unshakable hope for the future: these are the gifts, the commands and the promises of Jesus Christ. They are also the foundations of our best shared values, traditions and practices in Britain. They make us the country we can be — a gift and source of confidence to this troubled world, in which we live not only for ourselves but as a beacon of hope."

This is a big ask for our nation, but Christians can take the lead in this by looking after the poor, welcoming the foreigner and refugee, and bringing peace and reconciliation in situations of conflict and hate. Christ has equipped us with his Spirit of Love and Peace.

We should act as experts in mirroring God's love in daily life and as pioneers in establishing peace. Let us take up the role of reconciler and peacemaker in our families, our community, church, country and beyond our tightening borders. Let us work to reverse the growing inward looking attitude and change it into an openness that has characterised this nation for such a long time. Let us become, 'The country that we can be,' as Justin Welby puts it.

Once again we are the people who give hope and a future to all who live here.

We can reach out to the rest of the world that longs for peace, respect and understanding. Coincidentally Remembrance Sunday will fall on Armistice Day this year. In the leading up to this commemoration let us break down the barriers and regain the spirit of solidarity that inspired the allied forces who liberated Europe. Let this spirit be not just something that we remember as an attitude that's now long gone, but as the way we stand in life today and relate to all.

I wish you a year in this spirit of peace, love, solidarity and respect.

Happy New Year!

Erwin