

Read the Archbishop's address to General Synod today.

Thank you, Stephen.

Now we face a new time of trial, the second wave. We go into it knowing the fragility of those who can be struck down. We fear the loss of those we love. We see how an economy can be brought to its knees by a virus and that all the economists in the world do not have an answer. We hear with great shame of the growth in food bank demand, in abuse and domestic violence, of poverty. Many of the churches experience it themselves.

We do not know what kind of Church of England will emerge except that it will be different. It will be changed by the reality that for the first time all churches have closed in our 800-year history. The first time ever we have worshipped virtually.

We do not know what kind of country will emerge. We see good things. Courage, self-giving, faithfulness to those around, communities pulling together for the common good, finding new life.

We see bad things. Seeking self-interest. Divisions deepening. Other crises – of racism, of the economy, of hunger amongst children as well as adults, of the danger of mass unemployment. Of our children not getting the education they need. We see the tragedies of bereavement and the pains of long-term illness, whether of Covid or not, but made more severe by the pandemic. We see people being crippled by mental health issues made even more desperate because of isolation.

We see uncertainties, especially around Europe, for some the promise of Brexit, twice voted for, welcomed or regretted. We are aware of questions about the Union of our nation. We continue to prevaricate over the reality of the crisis in the environment.

Uncertainty, the trauma left behind by crisis in 2008, by austerity, by the divisions of the last few years may leave us with uncertainty fatigue and a rush to hasty decisions. It may make us afraid of our new realised fragilities, personally, in society, in the economy, in the nation, in the church. I observe it has given us a sort of national PTSD.

Yet we are not first and foremost an institution, not an organization. We are not our own to squabble over and seek to dominate. We are one small part of God's own people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, called by God to declare the wonderful works of the one who called us out of darkness into God's marvellous light. We are a people of faith and hope.

In this nation and around the world this is a time of trauma, of loss and bereavement and of struggle. Yet amidst it all the darkness does not overcome the light. We are to bear witness to the light for in so doing our faith bears witness to the hope within; we bring resilience, give courage, share mercy, bless our nation.

Out of these times we will see renewal, not because we are clever but because God is faithful. We will see a renewed and changed Church emerging from the shocks of lockdown. It is a Church that has fed so many, been in touch with the isolated through the heroic efforts of many people, led by clergy and laity with faithfulness. A Church which has continued to say its prayers and offer worship even if in new and unusual ways. How much we give thanks for them. It has loved and served children in schools, the homeless on the streets. As it has done so God has been at work among us. In the last months we have found the joy of meeting together to pray and worship even without music. We have seen so many come forward for training as ordinands. We have seen buildings that could not be used for worship used for food banks. We have seen chaplains in hospitals, standing shoulder to shoulder and strengthening the weary members of the NHS and being strengthened by them. We have seen God's order bringing Spirit at work among us and among others. We have seen God's Providence.

Today is a day of seeming formality. Yet we meet as God's people, not our own. We meet with the light whom no darkness can quench, the Word whom no clamour can still, filled, please God, with hope that makes sense because of God. We meet to debate and hopefully to pass a Measure. Yet above all we meet with Jesus Christ and in our ponderings we may begin to discern the church that God is causing, caressing, loving to emerge from these times, renewed in faith, infused with hope and compelled by love to serve and to bless the nation that we pray will rise renewed from these times.

4 min read

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