



Read Archbishop Justin Welby's Easter letter to partners and heads of churches around the world.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

(John 21.15-17)

The confusion and hurt of Peter contrast strikingly with the plain instruction of Jesus. In almost his last appearance in the flesh, before his ascension, Jesus shares a moment of intimate friendship and a meal with some of his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. This seemingly simple occasion is laden with symbolism, as if basic, material things – the fish, the fire, the bread – and ordinary actions have themselves become parables of the care the disciples are to exercise for those who love and follow Jesus. Feed my sheep! So the master commanded, and so the Church has, in his footsteps, tried to do these last two millennia, and so it will continue to do.

But how complicated, incomplete, and unsatisfactory that pastoral witness and care of the Church has often proved to be! We have, time and again, turned bread into stones, wine into bitter gall, fire into torture and death. We have, over the centuries, turned on each other. We have neglected, ignored and persecuted in the name of love.

How bitter this last year seems to have been! In the heart of the Holy Land, slaughter and chaos have reigned. I was in Jerusalem in October, trying to support our Anglican communities there, and other Christian traditions, and to learn about the suffering of the people of Gaza and elsewhere. I was in Armenia in early October, after the mass exodus of Armenian families from Nagorno-Karabakh. I was in Ukraine again just two months ago, witnessing the desperate effects of war. For all the people caught up in these conflicts, just as for anyone injured and traumatised by violence, it must seem as if there can no end to it all, no resurrection.

But still, even in the midst of all of this, there is hope, because we know that God is there before us, in Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep. Christians live the realism of knowing that human ambitions, time and again, run into sand, and yet at the same time they also share profoundly the vision of hope Christ's triumph over death brings to all people. So we cannot allow despair to poison our outlook on the world. It is a time of terrible conflict and danger, but our faith is in Christ the peacemaker and reconciler. This Easter, I pray that you will be strengthened in your faith, and blessed in your ministry, and that together we may learn this coming year what it means to feed Christ's sheep.

+Justin Cantuar:

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby

Archbishop of Canterbury

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