



Hi,

It's the first day of our second lockdown. These strange and uncertain times are stretching for so many people and there's been a huge amount for us all to process after our Prime Minister's announcement at the weekend and parliament's ratification of the four-week long lockdown yesterday. It's good to see the sun is shining today, that always lifts our spirits doesn't it!

A few comments to share across our SML church family:

- We are so aware that for some people the **prospect of this month-long lockdown** feels particularly overwhelming, whether that's because of concerns about further isolation, well-being and mental health, domestic strain, financial shortages. We don't want anyone to be suffering in silence, and please share your need with a friend, member of a life group, or contact the church office centrally here. Together, we are the 'Body of Christ' and, as a church family, over the month ahead let's be looking out to listen, support and encourage each other in every way we can. Thank you.
- Sadly, despite the efforts of Senior Church leaders, Theresa May and many others, **public worship is not permitted in church buildings for the next month**. This means that we cannot hold any 'live' services here at SML until Sunday 6 December, at the earliest. Of course, our online services will be continuing as usual, and it seems very timely for us to be honouring 'Remembrance Day' this coming Sunday.
- **Christmas** ! Inevitably we are now needing to plan and prepare with a combination of scenarios for our Advent and Christmas season. We'd so value your prayers as we seek creative inspiration from the Holy Spirit in shaping these, and hope to be able to share an outline provisional programme over the next few weeks.
- The Archbishops' of Canterbury and York and the Evangelical Alliance have encouraged all Christ-followers to **Make this lockdown a month of Prayer**. And, as part of that, pausing at 6pm each evening to pray and perhaps light a candle, as we pray light into the surrounding darkness. I encourage us all to commit to this focus, in a way that can fit best for you, over the month ahead.

[A Letter to the Nation from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York](#)

04/11/2020

**The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have invited the nation to join them in prayer, in a message encouraging 'calm, courageous and compassionate' responses to the difficulties of the second national lockdown in England.**

Dear Friends,

These are deeply challenging and difficult times for us all. When we are surrounded by fear and suffering, it can be hard to feel hopeful. This coming winter feels like it will be longer and darker than usual.

There is a story in the Bible where Jesus and his disciples are caught in a storm. The disciples are understandably terrified as the wind and waves threaten to overpower them. 'Why are you so afraid?', Jesus asks. This year, we too have been caught in a storm which often feels overwhelming. And yet we can look to Jesus, in the boat with us, who calms the storm and comforts us in our fear.

We are writing to share our belief that whoever you are, and whatever you happen to believe, you are loved by God. Beyond measure. We also want you to know that we are praying for you, particularly asking that Christ's love will comfort us, calm our fears, and lead our nation and our world through this terrible pandemic. Starting this week, we have asked every church to pray each day at 6pm. We invite you to join with us. You'll be able to find simple resources on the Church of England website and social media channels.

There are three other responses that we want to encourage everyone to consider -

First, let's be **calm**. By only buying what we need and not hoarding, or by reaching out to our neighbours as we did during the first lockdown, we can be stronger together in ways that are impossible if we go it alone. When things go wrong - as they always will with such complex challenges - let us look for good and right ways forward together.

Secondly, let's be **courageous**. There are many reasons to be fearful at the moment, but the story of Christ calming the waves calls us to give our fears to Jesus and have faith in Him. The British willingness just to get on with things is one of our very best characteristics – let us not be paralysed by fear. We will all need each other's courage in the months to come.

Thirdly, let's be **compassionate**. So many of us are holding so much pain - our own and the pain of those we love. We will need to be gentle, kind and patient with each other. In the first wave we showed we are a nation of compassion and kindness. Let's dig deep and keep that love for our neighbours strong in this second time of struggle.

Even though there is much darkness around us, there are also many points of light in the weeks ahead.

This Sunday is Remembrance Day. As we remember the courage and sacrifice of those who gave everything for this nation in war, we are also reminded of the possibility for hope after destruction, of new life after suffering. In the coming weeks, there are great religious ceremonies. For Hindus, Sikhs and Jains there is Diwali, the festival of light. Sikhs will celebrate the birth of Guru Nanak. The Jewish community will observe Hanukkah. Many Muslim communities have just celebrated Eid-e-Milad, the anniversary of the birth of Muhammad.

Soon it will be Christmas. At his birth Jesus was also called Emmanuel. It's a word that appears in lots of carols. It means 'God is with us'. And this is the message of Christmas: in Jesus, God is with us, sharing our darkness and our struggles, bringing comfort and joy. It is the source of our hope. As the Bible says: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:5) Let us shine in the darkness of this winter.

May God bless you and keep you, and all those you love.

**The Most Revd & Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury**

**The Most Revd & Rt Hon Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York**

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**Prayer from the Lectio 365 app** (*which is a wonderful app to add on your phone!*)

*Lord in these dark and difficult times, grant me the grace to seek your face with undiminished love. Replenish my reserves for the road is long. Support me in the coming days with glimpses of your goodness, hints of your holiness, and a song of hope in this very strange land. Amen.*

**A Prayer from Lee Abbey**

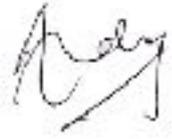
*God of stillness and storm, you are greater than our plans and designs, more powerful than our attempts to control. Guide us through life's uncertainties. Calm us in times of tempest. Shake us in our complacency. Teach us to know that you alone are God. Amen.*

Stay Safe, and Stay Connected to the LORD and each other.

5th November 2020

See you online on Sunday for our Remembrance Day Service!  
With my love and prayers,

Andy

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Andy Perry**

Vicar

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