

The Archbishop writes in The Telegraph on Remembrance Sunday

There was a bit of a stand-off earlier this week between the Church and the Government about whether churches could be open for public worship during the second lockdown. We felt we needed to put down a marker about the place of faith communities within the life and well-being of our nation and the nature and place of worship as central to our identity, purpose and motivation.

I fear these things are not well understood in British culture at the moment, but they remain true for Christian people and are shared with other faith communities whose leaders also signed the letter that was sent to the Prime Minister.

Worship is not a leisure pursuit. Although public worship in a church, mosque or synagogue isn't essential in the same way as healthcare or food, neither should churches be treated like bingo halls or cinemas. Worship is essential in other ways. It shapes identity and purpose.

We all worship something. If it is wealth and status then that will shape your desires and actions in one way; if it is God, particularly if it is the God who is made known to us in Jesus Christ, the one who comes to serve, then that will shape you in another. You will start to become a person of generosity, humility and service.

The reason we pressed the Government to allow us to continue some forms of public worship in the safe ways we have developed is because all the other good things that churches and faith communities bring to our nation flow from, and are shaped by, our worship. In so many of our communities, churches and faith communities provide essential services including foodbanks, night shelters, counselling and bereavement services, debt relief and care for the vulnerable. Most of all, through worship, we participate in a narrative of hope that confronts our greatest fear, death itself.

We have found safe, controlled and limited ways of conducting public worship. Furthermore, the Government has already given exemptions for funerals – and what are funerals but public acts of worship where we gather to lament the loss of someone we have loved and declare the Christian hope that God in Jesus Christ has encountered and conquered death?

Today is Remembrance Sunday, one of the few days left in the year when many people who do not naturally turn to the Church receive the ministry of the Church at the thousands of acts of remembrance that take place up and down the country. At least we are able to do that outside, or through streamed services like the one I am leading today in York Minster. But it could be possible for there to be other acts of worship in our churches that would bring solace, resilience and hope.

We recognise the hard decisions that the Government has to make. We will, of course, observe the law. However, it is also time for the Church to speak clearly about what is essential for the spiritual well-being of our nation. We all, whatever we believe, need space where we can encounter the deepest questions about ourselves, especially at the moment.

For Christians, the word remembrance is at the heart of our worshipping life. On the night before he died, Jesus broke bread and shared wine in anticipation of his death and asked that we do this in remembrance of him. The act of remembrance which is the Eucharist is our greatest treasure. Our Government and nation need to know that it is not a small thing for this to be denied us.

We don't intend to get into a fight over it. We also know that fasting is good for the soul. This is why the Archbishop of Canterbury and I have called for this second lockdown to be a month of prayer, particularly asking people of faith and all people of goodwill to pause at 6pm each evening and pray for the life of our nation, particularly our health service, our Government, and all those who suffer.

Meanwhile our presence online will continue. In many communities our buildings will be open as a space for prayer. And our hearts will be open in remembrance of him who shared our life on earth and who leads us beyond ourselves to that which is essential.

4 min read

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/remembrance-heart-christian-life>