

Clergy Letter: Time to 'Save Christmas!'

The Jeremiahs have it... The COVID statistics seem to be making it perfectly clear that things might get worse before they get better, and I think the public mood is slowly trying to come to terms with that.

And now we are hearing a cry to 'Save Christmas'. It seems that shortages of all types are predicted and there is a real danger of Christmas being 'ruined'!

There is a sense of desperation as we try and find ways to 'return to normality' and have a guarantee of something to look forward to.... And yet even the prospect of Christmas is looking grim now.

Theologians will remind us that we don't need to 'save Christmas' because actually Christmas is there to save us! It is about real light shining perilously in real darkness, not fairy lights on a tree. But even so we still long for the warm hearths and family togetherness around an overburdened Christmas lunch table having overspent on all those gifts that may – although probably not – be so welcomed. We've been celebrating a mid-winter festival of light and warmth since Stonehenge, and we want and need to celebrate it now.

But just saying 'boo' to the virus and getting on with the party might well end in tears.

Let me put it starkly. It's three weeks before Christmas. Blow it, you say, we're going to have a party. It's two weeks before Christmas and, blow it you say, let's go shopping, but some of your friends cry off because they're feeling a bit poorly. It's one week before Christmas and you're feeling a bit poorly yourself; your best friend has just rung up to say that they have Covid. It's Christmas, and ... well, the shine has well and truly gone off the gingerbread and no-one is feeling much like celebrating any more.

So? What can we do? Is there anything we can do? To return to those theologians, those keepers of the Christian tradition that Christmas is perhaps all about anyway.

From ancient times Christians kept fasts before they dived into their feasts. They didn't take the waiting out of wanting: they knew that a bit of waiting, a bit of preparing, a bit of pondering, would make the feast more fun.

And so we have: ADVENT: not just the Advent of a chocolate a day in December, but the Advent that starts 4 Sundays before Christmas and takes us slowly and carefully through the Bible's story of how we got into this pickle we call life, and how God's plan to join us in it and raise us from it came to pass.

It's all those readings you've heard at a traditional Carol Service, taken slowly, savoured for all they're worth. Then at Christmas the Great Twelve Days of Feasting can begin.

So, this year, how about Saving Christmas by Keeping Advent? Look for safe ways to buy the presents and order the food (and only buy enough not excessively). Give some time to writing some personal cards or messages. Perhaps consider giving to a charity rather than buying more 'stuff' that people perhaps don't need or want.

Then dust down your Bible and look up the stories for yourself. Light a candle for each Sunday. And enjoy the peace. Peace now, as you give Christmas the best chance it can have of going off well; and the promise of a peace that passes our understanding and that can surround us come what may.

Then you really will 'save Christmas' and Christmas will save you as well.

Many (peaceful) Christmas blessings for you and all your loved ones,

Your Rector

Reverend Mandy

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