

# How do we live in world on fire?



BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

I WONDER if you watched the BBC drama ‘World on Fire’, set in the Second World War? The title is an apt shorthand to express our current global and national situation, as Ukraine bleeds and the reality of a European war rages; with an ever-deepening spiral of violence in Israel-Palestine; and as millions feel so unsafe in their own communities that becoming a refugee seems the only viable option.

Closer to home, a cost of living crisis prompts many to ask, ‘will we heat or eat?’ while the Covid inquiry exposes vile, misogynistic texts. Floods and extreme weather have followed a summer in which much of Europe blazed. A world, local and global, on fire: we can feel hopeless and overwhelmed.

So how might we respond, as Christians? I recall a student questioning CS Lewis whether it was wrong to be debating truth, meaning and human virtue while war was raging and blood being shed. He was startlingly clear: it was *precisely* as civilisation is being fought over that we should explore the virtues for which so many were giving their lives.

For Christianity is an eyes open, ‘full look at the worst’ way of faith, hope and love. We pray for the Kingdom or reign of God to come on earth as it is in heaven,

and hope for the renewal of all things in Christ. At the heart of Christianity, in its global diversity and local expressions, stands the Cross of the Humble God. The Unexpected God of Advent and Christmas, who enters our condition, addresses our deepest human need – for the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with God and one another – and calls us home to love.

Like the first disciples, as Jesus was crucified, everything in me (perhaps, us?) wants to flee from suffering and look away. However, servants and followers of this Crucified and Risen Master, then and now, are called to something more demanding: to stand, like Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary and John, at the foot of the Cross, to keep our eyes open to suffering, pain and struggle, and to pray and work for love’s triumph.

My dear friends, brothers and sisters, looking to Jesus, we are called to pray continually, to share and live his story, and to speak up where we see injustice. In the strength the Holy Spirit gives, and looking to Jesus the author and pioneer of our faith, we are called to live in love for one another – whatever comes and whatever happens in God’s world – until the end of the age.

Will you join me in seeking this path in our life together?

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