

Dear friends

As we enter November with the nights drawing in and the start of another, though shorter, national lockdown, it is hard not to become dispirited and weary. We have been enduring national and localized restrictions for many months now: Businesses are failing, redundancies increasing, hospital appointments are being postponed and mental health issues are growing as people are feeling the effects of prolonged isolation and separation. As we approach Remembrance Sunday, I appreciate the frustration and even anger of those who feel their freedom is being denied, by the cancelling of Remembrance events. We have commemorated the sacrifices of our countrymen and women for over a hundred years, gathering together, acknowledging their sacrifice for our freedom, and yet this year we cannot do so. Perhaps to some, it feels like a betrayal of the call to 'take up our quarrel with the foe,' and lift high the torch. But friends, we face an unseen enemy which has no compassion, exploits our deepest weaknesses and seeks to undermine our greatest strength, namely our togetherness. For myself, one of the greatest legacies of the war years is the way in which people looked out for each other, putting others first and working for the best for all. We need to show the same determined spirit, looking out for our neighbour and thinking what is best for them. The questions that must be uppermost in our minds and hearts are: What can we do to keep everyone safe? How can we support and encourage one another? I am sure that we would all be devastated if someone, anyone in our community succumbed to this virus because of our inattention or disregard of safety measures. We may or may not believe in all the measures, but if we break them the responsibility becomes ours. We must look forward to the hope of Advent and the joy of Christmas, and not allow the present restrictions to erode our spirit or dampen our expectations. The darkest hour is just before

dawn. Therefore, let us find new creative ways to stir each other up and build a stronger community. Let us think of ways we can show acts of kindness to one another and bring joy to our hearts. Let us be thankful for every small mercy and remember to give thanks for each other every day.

May God bless you and keep you safe always.

John

