

James 1:27

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Ephesians 5:8-13

8 For once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible.

John 13:31-38

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.”

34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

36 Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus answered, ‘Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterwards.’ 37 Peter said to him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’ 38 Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

(Psalm 91:1-4; Eph 5:8-13; James 1:27; John 13:31-38)

Trinity 22, Sunday 17 Nov, 2024 – Safeguarding Sunday
*May I speak in the Name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit, Amen*

Today is Safeguarding Sunday, a Sunday the Church sets aside for an important subject. November is a month of remembering – we read the names of loved ones on All Saints Day and last week we remembered those killed in conflict.

On Safeguarding Sunday we also remember. We remember survivors of abuse and the Church's failure (our failure) to keep people safe. And we look forward and commit to do better in the future. Safeguarding is a painful subject, because we have hurt each other. Not only in war, but in everyday life, including in the Church.

That is clear from the events of this week (reports/resig). For me, the words of one victim made a big impression: *'our churches must become safe places for vulnerable people, it needs not only resignations, but **reformation.**'*

[Let us Pray]

Lord, as we look at safeguarding, we pray especially for those survivors re-traumatised again this week. Comfort, heal and continue to empower them. Where your Church has hurt and failed, may it and we truly repent, learn, turn to you and be forgiven. Amen

So on this Safeguarding Sunday - I want to say 3 things:

1. Get religious about safeguarding.
2. Be children of light and love.
3. Help us build a safe Church.

First – ‘get religious’ about safeguarding

I confess to being a bit ‘religious’ about health & safety. I am going to make this point by putting a hard hat on.

Now some people struggle with health & safety, thinking it goes way too far to avoid risks, abandoning common sense altogether. I get that - speaking as a father who was told off by the police for letting my boys play on ice.

But health & safety has saved many lives – I love the fact we can build a new skyscraper, and no-one dies. It was not always so, a rumoured 365 men died while building Ely Cathedral (and I suspect a lot more).

In the same way, I’m a bit *religious about safeguarding*. Not just because of damage caused to people – experiences that can scar for life – but because...
‘Safeguarding is at the heart of our Christian faith.

The Bible tells us so in Psalm 91 “*You who live in the shelter of the Most High will say to the Lord: my refuge, my fortress, my God in who I trust. Under his wings you will find refuge. You will not fear the terror of the night.* Or in James: *‘religion that is pure and undefiled - is to care for orphans and widows’.*

Our faith says we ourselves are safe in God and we should care for others – especially the most vulnerable.

So my 1st point is ‘get religious’ about safeguarding.

My 2nd point – is to be people of light and love

Paul's letter to the Ephesians said: *For once you were in darkness but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light - for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible.*

Our Safeguarding Sunday materials say: *“Paul urges Christians to have nothing to do with ‘deeds of darkness’ but to expose them. Exposing darkness takes courage and bringing things into the light is part of our calling to live out our faith. A major factor in abuse and harm is secrecy. Victims are forced to remain silent so that harm and abuse can continue.”* **So live as people of light.**

In our Gospel today Jesus gives a new commandment: *‘that you love one another.’* The context is foot washing (serving others) and betrayal of a friend (Judas and his kiss). Jesus serves and loves - even his betrayer – and asks us to do the same: *Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

Loving and serving **does not mean** we ignore bad behaviour – instead we expose it, we shine a light. But part of safeguarding is loving and serving others – even those who have let us down, who have hurt us.

Serious stuff – no excuses for not shining a light – but care and love for all involved.

So my 2nd point is be people of light and love

My 3rd point is help us build a safe Church

Let's be honest – Churches are full of vulnerable people – I know because I am one. I read a biography of a special forces soldier who admitted his need of God. We are at our strongest when we understand where and when we need help.

Churches **are not** full of perfect people, but people who know they need help. People who've accepted God's help (the baptised) and people looking for God's help (the 'not-yet' baptised). This is Church – *a group of weak, vulnerable, imperfect people*. If that is how you feel this morning – you are in good company.

To this group Jesus says: *love one another*. Churches should be safe places for vulnerable people but because we are not perfect – we bump up against each other – we say and do things that hurt each other – we fail.

If you have been hurt or if you have hurt others – Church is a good place to be and a good place to get better. Please talk to us – Alison, me, Matthew & Kellie. Or at coffee on Thursday morning's – thanks Lynne.

We need to talk, learn how to keep each other safe and learn to forgive each other. This is tough, but it is also mission: *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*.

My 3rd point is help us build a safe Church

So in conclusion on this Safeguarding Sunday

Apart from the first time you saw the preacher wear a hard hat in the pulpit - how should we respond?

1st let's get religious (serious) about safeguarding. Start by reflecting on this sermon and the resources for today. Pray and ask God to lead on what to do, who to talk to, how we might support?

2nd let's give time to each other, speak the truth; keep no secrets; tell no lies. Being a safe Church is a different challenge from other groups: *we learn to love people here* – so we can love people out there - *they shall know we are Christians because of our love for one another.*

3rd get more involved in St Mary's. Talk to me, Alison, Matthew or Kellie. Help us to help you to be part of a community that welcomes and supports vulnerable people. We can all get better at safeguarding.

Churches should be safe places for vulnerable people. Places of forgiveness for past failures – and places where we pick ourselves up and learn to do better – places for flourishing under the wings of God's love.

I hope that despite all the challenges of these days you will join us in this adventure of being a safe Church.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen

Letter from Bp Sarah

For survivors of church abuse this period has been - and will continue to be - an immensely painful and challenging time. I know you are deeply conscious of this.

Many of you have said how difficult it was to stand before your congregations last Sunday, after the Makin Review revealed the abhorrent crimes of John Smyth and the tragic failures of the Church's response.

You will know people in your congregation who have suffered abuse, some of whom have been re-traumatised by the inaction or deeply inadequate response of the Church. There will also be victims and survivors of whom we are unaware.

Given the contents of the Makin Report, and its ongoing reverberations, including [the resignation](#) of the Archbishop of Canterbury today, it will be with a grave sense of responsibility and no little trepidation that we face the next phase in the life of the Church of England.

I am conscious that this Sunday - Safeguarding Sunday – will seem more important than ever.

In this crucial moment, we have the opportunity to recognise our individual and collective responsibility for those in our pastoral care; to lament deeply the history of our Church; and to renew our determination to achieve the rigorous and thorough reset of safeguarding structures necessary to deliver a safer church.

Central to this must be a genuinely survivor-focused approach, with independent scrutiny and mandatory reporting. A safe church can no longer remain just an aspiration, and survivors must be key architects and adjudicators of the process to get us there.

You are very much in my thoughts and prayers as, together, we lament the past and set about the vital task of creating a better future.