

Safeguarding Sunday 2025

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.'

Jesus does not mince his words in our gospel reading today. He makes it abundantly clear that children are incredibly important to him and that they are deeply wanted and welcome in his presence. Jesus also makes it abundantly clear that the care, safety and well-being of children is of the utmost importance to him.

Children are among the most vulnerable human beings, and Jesus' clear welcome and care for them, I believe, also shows us something of Jesus' general attitude towards any of the most vulnerable human beings in our communities. God welcomes all and cares about the well-being and safety of all. Jesus' welcome and care for the most vulnerable should be a guide to us as a church community on how to welcome and care for children and any other human beings that might at times be vulnerable.

Church communities ought to be spaces of welcome, safety and care. Unfortunately, this is not always a reality, as some of us might be painfully aware of. Sometimes we idealise church, as a place and community where everyone is a little nicer and a little better than the rest of the

world. But the reality is that we are all human. Church communities are made up of human beings and human beings are imperfect. We make mistakes and human beings in church can get just as blinded by power, money or sex as any other human beings.

That is a hard truth to wrestle with. Being Christians does not make us better human beings. Being Christians simply means we know that we are imperfect and in need of God's grace and mercy, and we try one day at a time to follow Christ, to love God with all we are and have and to love our neighbours as ourselves. But being a Christian doesn't mean we can't get things awfully wrong. Being a priest, a churchwarden, a PCC member, children's or youth leader or any other kind of volunteer in church, doesn't mean we can't get things awfully wrong.

When people with any kind of power over others in church get things awfully wrong it can have absolutely devastating consequences. A person's life can be shattered, their physical and mental health can seriously suffer and it can distort a person's understanding of God and destroy their faith.

Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling-block comes!

God welcomes all and cares about the well-being and safety of all. This is why safeguarding within our church community matters. Because each and everyone of us is precious in the eyes of God, with all our strengths and vulnerabilities. Look around you. Each person here, each person we encounter, matters and is precious in the eyes of God. God's will for all

of us is for us to know that we can belong, God's will for us is that we can be safe and cared for in the ways we most need. And Jesus' words in our gospel reading today remind us, that this is really serious business.

About this time a year ago the Makin Report came out and shocked many in how abuse could go on unhindered in the Church of England for years. For abuse to go on unhindered it takes more than just an abuser. It takes communities that are unable to notice the signs. It takes people in power not taking actions when suspicions are voiced. It takes people within communities and in places of power to silence victims for fear of the consequences if the horrors came to light.

To create safer church communities, it takes more than a safeguarding coordinator and DBS checks. For us to become the safest church community we can be, we all have to work together, it takes all of us to be and become a church that truly welcomes those most vulnerable and ensures this is truly a community where their safety and well-being have top priority. It takes all of us together to become a community where people of all ages, any class, any socio-economic background, any gender, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation and any physical, emotional or mental needs can truly belong, know they are safe and know that their well-being matters.

It takes commitment from all our volunteers to do their safeguarding training, to be committed to getting their DBS checks done, to get through the, admittedly time-consuming, safer recruitment processes. It takes all of us to look around each Sunday for anyone who might have

no one to talk to, to reach out, to check on each other how we are doing, to listen carefully to each other's stories and struggles. It takes all of us to speak up if we have a concern about someone's safety or well-being. It takes all of us to share God's welcome, love and care in words and actions with every human being we encounter. God welcomes, loves and cares for each one of us and God calls us to radically share that welcome, love and care with all whom we encounter.

Amen.