

Sermon

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we join churches throughout the Diocese in Europe, in fact, we join churches throughout the Church of England, in marking Safeguarding Sunday. We reflect on what it means to be a safe, loving and accountable community of God's people. We reflect on how our calling to follow Jesus includes the call to protect, respect, and cherish every person made in God's image.

Safeguarding is sometimes thought of as a policy issue, something administrative and obligatory. And yes, it is necessary. But at its heart, safeguarding is a spiritual responsibility and a theological conviction. It is about how we live out the Gospel. It's about what it means to be the Body of Christ — a body that heals, not harms; a body that shelters, not excludes; a body that reflects the love of God in our world. It affects us all.

When we speak of safeguarding, we are speaking about the character of God and the kind of community we are called to be.

"He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge." These words from today's passage in Psalm 91 give us one of the most tender and powerful images in Scripture. The psalmist describes God as a mother bird — not distant or indifferent, but close, sheltering, fiercely protective. That's who God is. God's protection isn't abstract, formulaic or legalistic. Rather, it is intimate, attentive, personal.

Safeguarding is one of the ways we live out that divine tenderness. When we ensure that our church is a place of safety, when we take care to protect children, adults, and all who are vulnerable, we are mirroring the heart of God. We become the wings of that divine protection for others.

In a world where too many people have been hurt, including within the Church, this image of God as a sheltering refuge is deeply important. It reminds us that La Côte Anglican Church must never be a place of fear, but a place of refuge. Never a source of harm, but a source of healing.

In our second reading, the prophet Micah asks a simple but searching question: “What does the Lord require of you?” And the answer is clearly given: “To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” This lies at the heart of safeguarding.

To “**act justly**” includes confronting wrong, to stand against all forms of abuse and exploitation, to ensure that harm is neither ignored nor excused. Justice is not about punishment for its own sake — it is about truth, accountability, and the restoration of dignity in a loving, supportive community.

To “**love mercy**” involves listening with compassion and care. It means believing survivors and supporting them in their pain, even when their stories are difficult to hear. It means recognising the image of God in those who suffer. It means caring also for the caregivers in our community.

And to “**walk humbly**”, that requires us to admit we do not always get it right. In recent years, the Church of England, has had to face painful truths about times when it has failed to protect, failed to listen, failed to act. Humility means acknowledging that and committing ourselves afresh to repentance, learning, and change.

Micah’s words remind us that safeguarding isn’t about superficial compliance, box-ticking. It’s about **character**. It is about being a people who embody justice, mercy, and humility in all that we do.

When I was a child, I loved re-reading the story in today's gospel passage about Jesus surrounded by children. The disciples tried to send them away. Perhaps they thought that Jesus was too busy or too important to spend time with children. But Jesus stops them, rebukes them and says, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

In this moment, Jesus does something radical. He lifts up those who are small, powerless, and easily overlooked, and he says: "They are at the centre of the kingdom." Jesus does not just tolerate the children — he blesses them. He values them. He enfolds them in his arms.

And Jesus did not only welcome children. He also restored those who were wounded, marginalized or shamed. Think of his healing of many lepers, and of the woman who lived with haemorrhaging for 12 years. He restored them to health and to active participation in their communities. When we make space for the vulnerable — when we listen, protect, and honour them — we are doing what Jesus did. We are saying with our actions: "You belong. You are loved. You are safe here." Safeguarding is about extending that same welcome and safety to all — to anyone who needs to know that the love of God is not a threat but a refuge. It is about helping people flourish in the fulness of life that Jesus came to bring.

Safeguarding is not the job of a few. Rather, it is the shared calling of us all. In our conversation, our hospitality, our online presence, and our care for one another, we are each responsible for creating an environment where **all** feel safe and respected.

As the apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Ephesian Christians, "The body is one, though it has many members." When one part suffers, all suffer. When one part is safe, all can flourish. Safeguarding is an act of worship as it is a way of demonstrating our love of God by loving our neighbour. Safeguarding Sunday is a moment to recommit ourselves to pray for survivors, to support those who protect others, and to renew our promise that our church will always be a place of welcome, care and trust. Amen.