

Safeguarding 16.11.2025

Throughout the Church of England, we will be talking about Safeguarding today. If you are a visitor this morning, you may be wondering, what on earth is that?

Safeguarding sounds like a visit from the police or getting your car engine checked. It is not at all like that. It began with a newspaper reporter in a town in England, who discovered something terrible. A year earlier the most successful Television performer Jimmy Saville had died. Thousands came to his funeral, It looked as if we had lost a great man. The reporter found out the truth about him. He had abused over 450 people of different ages. The most terrible thing was that many people knew about him, and nobody stopped him. One good thing came out of all of this. People woke up to their responsibility to protect people. The newspapers and the television at long last woke up and it soon became clear that not just children, but many other people of various ages and backgrounds were being abused. Sadly, the Church of England had also failed to protect its members.

About eleven years ago, it began to take the matter in hand. The Diocese of Europe had a difficult task. How can you train volunteers to become trainers in their part of Europe? The answer was to train people from all over Europe people in 3 days. I was one of this this group and I got the job first of going round Germany and that brought me here and I got to know this church and of course Petrina. Then came covid and since then I have been in the much smaller team that trains people over the internet. As time as gone on, we have made a lot of progress, but of course, it is never possible to have a church that is like heaven.

Our first reading this morning from the Book of Malachi is a reminder that there are arrogant and evildoers in our society and our task as Christians is to transform the society in which we live. The task that lies ahead for us should not be a burden for us. As Psalm 98 reminds us -the Lord has made his salvation known, his love and faithfulness are clear to see and there will come times when we shall shout for joy to the Lord.” 2. Thessalonians ch3 v6-13 brings us back to the difficult side of living with our fellow Christians. Paul is very direct with the Christians he had visited in Thessalonica. He reminded them that he has not sat around doing nothing, neither had he demanded money from them. Now you would expect them to have got on with the job, but no they were idle and disruptive. Paul is very direct he does not regard them as an enemy, but he makes it abundantly clear that that they must change their behaviour. If they don't, they are not to be regarded as an enemy, but be told clearly that they must change. This is probably one of the most difficult tasks of the clergy and the Church Wardens. I know from a long life of working within the Church of England, but it is a part of safeguarding.

The Gospel reading challenges us to remember the woes of the world, perhaps by prayer, or works of charity, or political activism. Those are external reactions; but, at its climax (verses 12-19), the Gospel turns from the world around us to the internal nature of Christians as a group (the form of the Greek tells us that Jesus is talking to the community, not to individuals). The threat that they face is first active and external (“they will persecute you”): a warning about what others will do to the faithful. Then Jesus switches to the passive, entering into the experience of the persecuted faithful: “You will be betrayed; you will be hated.”

These verses weave threat and defence into a single fabric. Being persecuted will give Jesus's followers a chance to testify whether by word or example. The Lord himself will give them the words and wisdom to confront their accusers. Being betrayed and hated, even killed, will become their opportunity to show endurance, which — rather than the suffering and persecution, even the betrayal and death — is what will gain them the Lord's blessing: “By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

So, winning one's soul (or "life-force", or "security of life") is both the goal for a Christian and the mark of a Christian. Mark and Matthew (8.36; 16.26) warn us about the alternative: "What will it profit someone to win the whole world and forfeit their life?" We can all lose our lives by striving to gain what is worthless. But we can also all run in such a way as to win. And we can all endure.