

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Safeguarding Sunday, 17th November 2024

Bible texts: Ezekiel 36:25-27, Mark 13:1-8

Introduction & interview

I am sure most people here will have heard the news that last Tuesday the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, announced his resignation

It was about the mishandling of a terrible safeguarding case that saw over a hundred boys and young men abused by an individual called John Smyth in England, then later in Zimbabwe and probably also South Africa. Smyth was in a position of trust and authority which he abused to prey on his victims. It is first and foremost them who are in our prayers.

There is no question of the Archbishop's involvement in any of this. There is a question about whether he was aware of it before he became Archbishop. The key issue is that when in post he was misadvised and as a result Smyth never faced justice. Indeed, he probably carried on abusing. It's for this error by the institution which he leads that Archbishop Welby has taken responsibility and resigned

And what is at the heart of this tragedy is that people failed again and again to speak out about what they knew

For some it was a tragically misplaced desire to protect the church or at least the particular tradition in the church from which Smyth came – and so it is a tragic outcome from the disunity of the church

For others in and around the abuse it may well have been due to the layers of secrecy and loyalty that ran through the culture of English public schools and the camps where this happened

The Church of England, particularly at local church and Diocesan level is a very different place from the time when the abuse happened and also 2013 when the particular failure to act adequately by Archbishop took place

That difference is what today's Safeguarding Sunday is all about – seeing safeguarding as a shared responsibility by us all to ensure that our churches are communities which are safe and where all can flourish

And central to that is this year's theme: Let's talk about it, talk about safeguarding and safeguarding concerns

Moira is our chaplaincy Safeguarding Officer and I want to ask her a few questions

Interview with Moira Hogg, Chaplaincy Safeguarding Officer

- What is Safeguarding?
- What is your role as Safeguarding Officer?
- We hear a lot about making church a safe place for all but what does it mean for us to be a safe church.'
- Do you have a final message for the congregation today ...?

We hear our two readings against the backdrop of Safeguarding Sunday but also the baptism of Ezechiel

Readings

Short Sermon

Imagine walking inside a great and sacred building – a cathedral, a temple

How do you speak? We usually whisper

There is a natural and right sense of awe and reverence – we feel we know our place, and can often sense the weight of history, tradition and authority

As the disciples say in the Jerusalem Temple: “Look teacher, what large stones and what large buildings ...”

Jesus is clear that religious buildings like this and the institutions that lie behind them are always only provisional not absolute, they are means and not ends

Which is why, to the surprise of his hearers, Jesus doesn't look at the big stone and say Wow, but instead: “Do you see these great buildings. Not one stone will be left here, all will be thrown down” predicting the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in AD 70

As the rather shaken disciples ask him to explain he says: “Beware that no one leads you astray.”

He's speaking about His bigger purposes of the Kingdom of God: the loving rule of God of which we have spoken to Ezechiel today in his baptism

A Kingdom symbolised not in the power of those buildings and institutions but in the sign of the cross just made on Ezechiel's forehead

The sign of Jesus' costly and life-giving love

A love that demands that anything that denies that love for another – abuse of or neglect of the responsibilities of a trusted role, the exploitation or misuse of power in relationships, misplaced loyalty or secrecy at the expense of another; anything that denies life - is named and brought into the light

That's why in our own baptism and as we welcome others into the church through baptism, we are all invited to turn and to keep turning from those things that the prophet Ezekiel calls things from the old heart and instead to turn to Christ, however hard, costly and inconvenient that may be and allow Him to create a new heart with us

And that new heart includes very practical things in our 24/7 lives

Like not turning away from even the suspicion of abuse but rather following the simple but right steps and courses of action such as Moira has mentioned – look at the end of e-News every week for the 4 Rs: Recognise, Respond, Report, Record

It is not for us to investigate. Its not for us to look away. It's certainly not for us to ever cover up.

It is simply for us to do our part in what is often just putting in place right safeguards to ensure safety for another person who is vulnerable due to age or circumstances.

But it may also be about a step that eventually rescues a child or vulnerable adult from a range of situations that amount to some sort of abuse

How good that we baptise a baby on safeguarding Sunday!

Here at the heart of our worship is Ezechiel, one for whom we at All Saints commit to create the conditions for growth into the person that Jesus has created him to be – through all the possible ways we can offer for him to learn, to grow, to contribute, to serve

And also to do all of that in a community that is safe and that together understands and acts in ways that makes for the healthy and just relationships that we call safeguarding

Or as Archbishop Justin said of his resignation: “I pray this decision points us back towards the love that Jesus has for every one of us.”