

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church, Luxembourg

Preached on Safeguarding Sunday 2025

Bible text: I John 3:16-end



Almost exactly a year ago, around Safeguarding Sunday 2024, Justin Welby resigned as Archbishop of Canterbury with these words ...

“Having sought the gracious permission of His Majesty The King, I have decided to resign as Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Makin Review has exposed the long-maintained conspiracy of silence about the heinous abuses of John Smyth.

When I was informed in 2013 and told that police had been notified, I believed wrongly that an appropriate resolution would follow.

It is very clear that I must take personal and institutional responsibility for the long and retraumatising period between 2013 and 2024.

I hope this decision makes clear how seriously the Church of England understands the need for change and our profound commitment to creating a safer church. As I step down I do so in sorrow with all victims and survivors of abuse.

The last few days have renewed my long felt and profound sense of shame at the historic safeguarding failures of the Church of England. For nearly 12 years I have struggled to introduce improvements. It is for others to judge what has been done.”

His resignation statement ended like this ...

“For above all else, my deepest commitment is to the person of Jesus Christ, my saviour and my God; the bearer of the sins and burdens of the world, and the hope of every person.”

The theme of this year’s Safeguarding Sunday is Action speaks Louder

It is sadly appropriate that Archbishop Justin’s struggles to improve safeguarding culture and practice in the Church of England should end in this action of taking personal and institutional responsibility for failure in exactly this area

Words of regret or apology combined with the action of resigning has become pretty rare these days

So it is worth pondering that step by a Christian leader, especially to help us dig deeper into our Bible reading from I John and this year’s Safeguarding Sunday theme: Actions speak louder

I John is the epistle of love

Look forward to chapter 4:8 and there we read: God is love

Not just that God loves, but that God is love

Love is the very essence of His being, love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit

That love spills out in action - in creating, in delighting in active relationship with all He has created, including you and me,

God's love spills out in heartbreak at the sin and pain of the world, in the long story of God's steps to act about this that start in the OT and finds its highlight in the coming of Jesus,

God's love spills out in His costly love entering into the world in person and in Jesus, and that love finds its highpoint on the cross

And God's love spills out in action as three days later the risen Jesus is seen to be absorber of sin, defeater of death, forgiver of sinners

As it says at the start of our passage: We know love by this, that he (Jesus) laid down His life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for others (3:16)

Laying down His life for us is short-hand for the cross - that's the unique selfless, life-giving sort of love that we are talking about

Towards the end of this amazing epistle of love we then read: We love because He first loved us (4:19)

As it says at the end of our passage, in v24: All who obey God's commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

So its only as this amazing truth of Jesus first loving us in this laying down way becomes our lived experience - that we are in a position to then love others in the same laying down, Action speaks louder sort of way

Why is that?

In the historic "in time and place" event of God's love acting in the cross and resurrection the centre of gravity shifted in the whole created order, in history

Sin and death are still present - but now with their ultimate power defeated

This is no magic wand - look around the world to see the conflicts, the exploitation, and even most sadly look into the church to see abuse and failures to act

That is a reason to grieve at the evil and, for our part in that in any way - systematically or personally, to take the step of real repentance, like the Archbishop, as "our hearts to condemn us" (v20)

Seeing that pain and evil is also a reason to act, join in with God's Kingdom work - but not just out of our own strength, or even by being inspired by the example of Jesus's self-giving

... but instead out of what John calls God's love abiding in us through the Holy Spirit (v24)

Lets pause and read that verse: All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.



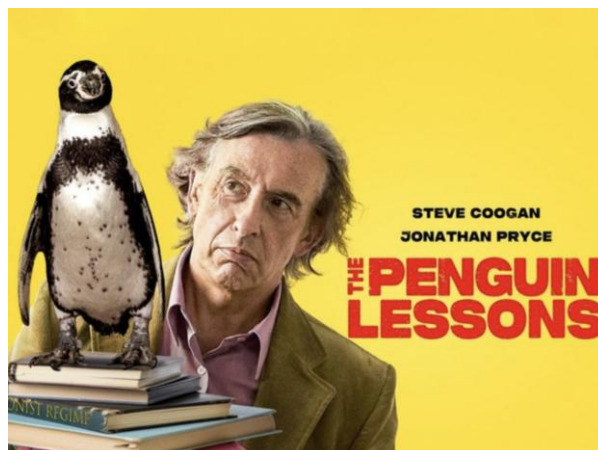
You know the safety drill on every flight. When they get to what will happen should the oxygen mask drop from the panels above ..

You put yours on first before trying to help someone else

Its in this daily being filled, rooted, established in God's love that (1) Jesus' example and inspiration to act is joined with (2) His power to act

Its both living (1) out the love of Jesus and (2) living out of the love of Jesus

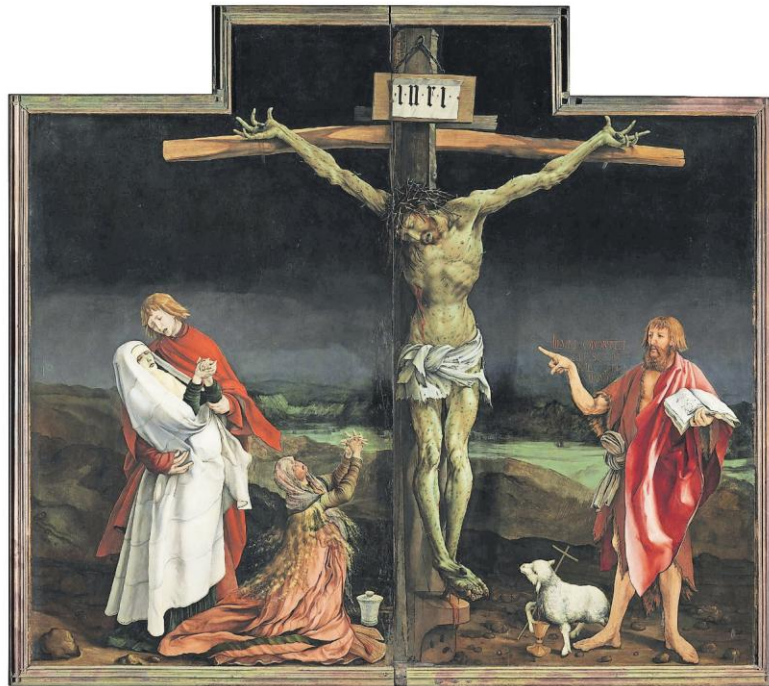
Our action must arise out of our abiding, all that connects us in a living way to Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit - the daily practices of prayer, Bible, worship and sacraments



How many of you have seen the film 'The Penguin Lessons', set in Argentina in the 1970s when the military dictatorship was making anyone who protested disappear. A schoolteacher in a British school finds himself adopted by a penguin after he acts to save it from an oil slick. In the network of relationships, however, he fails to act when he sees an Argentinian activist friend being arrested - he looks away, doesn't get involved, then tells her grandmother he couldn't get through the crowd

I find it really interesting that at the heart of the cross and resurrection, the story of God's love, there are those who look away and those who turn up and act

Actions speak louder



Isenheim altar by Matthias Grünewald

Painted ca. 1475

Peter who has proclaimed Jesus as Messiah on the road, that he will follow Jesus even to death. But then in the courtyard Peter looks away and fails to act three times, denying he knows Jesus. And like nearly all the other disciples Peter is absent at Golgatha and Jesus' crucifixion

Mary, and maybe the John who is the writer of the gospel and this letter, are there - and interestingly are the first to see and believe the amazing resurrection truth of Easter day

To be a church and individuals committed to living out love and living out of the love of God finds many expressions

We are moved to pray and build relationship with, for example, fellow Christians in Ukraine and the West Bank - praying for Layan, reaching out to her church at Ramallah

We seek to play our part in sharing the good news of the freedom Jesus offers to all, witnessing, inviting

And in our life together, we commit ourselves to love in action, love where action speaks louder, not least about safeguarding

It's what we prayed in the Collect, the special prayer for today

Safeguarding is not just a bolt on extra

But one important way of living out the love of Jesus that arises from our living out of that love day by day as individuals and as a church community here at All Saints

Loving God, the embodiment of living and loving community, help us to be a church that:

loves, welcomes, protects, listens, learns, serves,

repents, restores, transforms, values, cares and believes.

God of Justice and compassion, hear our prayer. Help us, heal us, guide us.

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

Which word stand out for you as the Action that is speaking loudly to you as something you can do to help make this a safe place for all?

Pause

Pray