

Introduction

This year's theme for Safeguarding Sunday is "let's talk about it". For some this will mean talking about what's happened to them, for others it's about talking about how to make the Church a safe refuge to find God, our shelter in the storm, and to find strength there to bring about change.

Our Lectionary readings today all speak of finding safety, security and shelter in God amidst tumultuous times. They are a good starting place to think about the role of safeguarding in the church as we seek to make our congregations places of safety, security and shelter.

Call to Worship

Arise in times of anguish and come to God, **who delivers us.**
Listen to God's voice so that we awaken
to everlasting life not everlasting contempt.
See through the light in the gloom to perceive God's glory
shine as the brightness of the day, like the stars forever and ever.

Prayers of Approach, Confession, and Grace

We come to meet You, delivering God, in an age of uncertainty;
we greet You with our pain and our praise,
 seeking healing in our weary woundedness.
We cannot measure how You heal or answer our prayers,
yet faith and doubt combine to give us glimpses of Your coming Kingdom
 where public and private agony will find peace.

We gather at Your table, Liberating Jesus, to be fed by Your own self,
to see Your hands hold, heal, and warn when we go astray
and embrace us in welcome when we turn back to You.
In times of difficulty, we are tempted to trust
 in our wealth, politicians, and armies instead of in You.
Forgive us when we turn away from You,
when we cling to the safety of our pain, fear and memories which haunt us,
 and when we trust in anything other than You.

Give us the courage to heal, to turn back to, and trust in, You.
We discern your presence, Most Holy Spirit,
as perfume in the air, as light in the gloom, as joy in despair;
meet us here, O God, to mend and tend us,
to disentangle peace from our pain,
and to make Your broken people whole. Amen.

With resonances from
John Bell's *We Cannot Measure How You Heal*

Prayer for Illumination

Bless us, O God, with Your counsel, as the Word is read and proclaimed.
Instruct our lives and gladden our hearts that as we hear and think,
You may stir us to action and show us the path of life
where, in Your presence, there is fullness of joy. Amen

All Age Activity

Collect a series of items that keep us safe or offer us protection e.g. cycle helmet, an umbrella, sunscreen, a shield, oven gloves, sunglasses, plasters, shinpads etc. Display them on a table or pass them around the group. Be as creative as you can. Ask people to guess what the items have in common. Can the group think of any other examples of things that help keep us safe? Read the verses from Psalm 16 which describe God as a place of safety and refuge. Explain that as God's people, we are called to be like God Our church community should be a place where everyone can feel, and be, safe. But that doesn't just happen on its own. Just like these objects we need to have things in place that help us to do that. Today we're going to be thinking about some of those things and asking God to help us be a safe place for all.

From Three Thirty Eight

Readings

Daniel 12:1-3 | Psalm 16 | St Mark 13:1-8

Sermon Notes

There are many places in our world where we long for the Kingdom to break in more fully. Our faith tells us the Kingdom is coming and will shine in the dark, yet our eyes only show a glimmer in the gloom. This sense of trusting there's more going on underpins our three readings today.

Daniel

This is a difficult book – it doesn't appear much in the Lectionary. It was written to encourage faithful discipleship in the face of a powerful oppressive empire which neither

understood nor cared about Jewish life and practice. Against this imperial oppression the author of Daniel asserts God's sovereignty. Today's passage concerns a power vacuum after the death of a king - all changes of government can be disruptive; in the ancient world a peaceful transition of power that we (hopefully) see in democracies today was not guaranteed. Rival claimants to a throne might battle it out and the ability to quietly get on with life became more and more difficult. Daniel offers comfort that this change too will pass. Daniel introduces Michael into the equation as a great ruler who will protect God's people; the name "Michael" means "who is like God?" and later tradition saw Michael as an archangel. The passage is a rare glimpse of Jewish belief in an afterlife; the idea is to provide hope, relief to those suffering and to show that God is not far away. Daniel thinks those who remained true to God under the oppression of empire will rise to light and life whilst those who weren't faithful will rise to shame and contempt. Those who have faith can see beyond the dull light and see the colours and glory of God's coming Kingdom.

The Psalm

Like the Gospel, and like the passage from Daniel, the Psalm is about offering hope in uncertain times. The poet opens the Psalm asking for God's protection and refuge. In our contemporary society we are constantly being told to be afraid – the consequences of global warming, the dangers of smoking or eating too much sugar, the dangers of crime and fear of the outsider all permeate our media – it attracts attention, it sells. Instead, the Psalmist seeks to reassure and offers an antidote to fear; trust in the Lord and ignore those who say otherwise. The Psalm opens and closes with assertions of trust in God; in uncertain and dangerous times this is what matters; uncertainty can produce anxiety, living with danger can be horrific. The Psalmist offers faith in God as a source of stability, security and strength. God is not just a shelter from the storms and pains of life but a means by which injustice, pain, abuse and oppression can be resisted and subverted. The security which comes from God's love can give strength to speak and to act; which is why when abuse is perpetuated, tolerated or covered up by the Church we betray our fundamental calling.

St Mark

Like Daniel's words in the face of the moving political tectonic plates in the ancient near east, Jesus' words look to world changing events. The destruction of the Temple came in the year 70; all that remains are parts of the Western Wall and an area where the Temple was to be expanded – now with a mosque on called Haram al-Sharif/the Temple Mount. In Jesus' time the Temple was the centre of Jewish life and worship; to imagine the destruction of this Temple would have been horrific. In such horrible times anyone who offers certainty might be believed and followed. We've seen in our political life the rise of the strong leader who offers certainty, easy answers to difficult questions who blame the weak and vulnerable for problems caused by systems controlled by the rich. Jesus' warning not to follow those who promise a foothold in times of cataclysmic change is useful for us now to remember in times of political and environmental change. Instead

of the strong leader, the problem-solving blamers we need to cling to Jesus who offers us true security in an age of change where we don't often see justice, where the powerful manage to stay in power even when governments change, and when social media conspires with those who pedal hate to drive up fearful ratings. Jesus' good news can seem like fiction in an age of horror; Jesus' presence can comfort, inspire, strengthen and move us to action.

Weaving the threads

We live in uncertain times; who would have predicted the breakout of riots in the summer in many cities in England and Northern Ireland? We've elected a new UK government who seem to make much of the economic legacy they've inherited and are concentrating on telling how bad it is rather than being hopeful about change. The outcome of the American election hangs in the balance as I write but will be known when these notes are used. Has the American public voted for the strong white man with easy answers or the nuanced mixed-race woman who ran for office with a sense of joy? Life is hard for those struggling to get by – the reduction of support for pensioners this winter will hit some very hard indeed; many people struggle to afford to rent somewhere decent to live and for many the dream of owning their own home is a laughable fiction.

Many of those who have had to live with various forms of abuse have not been believed when they told their stories; horrifically some experienced abuse within the Church. In all these situations of pain, confusion and injustice these readings offer hope. Daniel's assertion that God safeguards His people with justice – even justice that happens beyond the grave as it is denied in life – offers hope. The Psalmist's certainty that in God we find safety and security gives a space for action, to tell the truth, to demand justice, to cry for change. Jesus' words in the Gospel reading remind us to look for him as the calm centre in the storms and struggles of life; not simply as a refuge but as a place to regroup, heal and work for change.

An Act of Commitment

As God's people we are called to glimpse the glory of the coming Kingdom, where all are safe and valued, where justice shines like the stars at night, and where all hurts are healed.

As God's people we are called to make our churches reflect the values of the coming Kingdom and so I ask:

Will you show God's love by treating everyone with respect and dignity, love and grace, seeking to harm no one?

With the help of God, we will.

Will you help make and keep this congregation safe and support all those who have safeguarding responsibilities?

With the help of God, we will.

Will you make space for those who've been hurt and harmed?

With the help of God, we will.

Will you work for the Kingdom so that all might be safe,
those who face justice will find the grace of repentance, self-knowledge, and change,
and so that healing becomes a hallmark of the Church?

With the help of God, we will.

Will you learn to see beyond the gloom and use the eyes of faith to see
the light, colour, excitement, and energy of God's coming Kingdom?

With the help of God, we will.

May the God who began this good work within you,
continue it until it is finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. **Amen.**

Intercessions

Loving God,
we lay before you the challenges that confront us
at home, at work, in our communities and churches.
May your Son, the Good Shepherd,
guide and shape the life of your Church
that all may find a welcome, secure in your presence.

Jesus, Lord of the Church, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Renew your Church in the love of truth and in passion for justice.
Take from us all hypocrisy and deceit,
and teach us to serve with humility and honesty those whose lives are broken.

Jesus, Lord of the Church, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Help us to cherish children and all in our community who are vulnerable,
to protect them, and keep them safe.
May this place rejoice to be a place
where your love is celebrated with integrity.

Jesus, Lord of the Church, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Bring into your healing presence
all who have been damaged and diminished by abuse,
or whose lives continue to be overshadowed by guilt or fear,
May sorrows be shared and memories be healed.

Jesus, Lord of the Church, **in your mercy, hear us.**

May those who have been damaged by abuse
not simply survive, but flourish.

May young and old discover your life-giving love,
and delight in your gift of life,
so that fun, laughter and joy overflow to your glory.

Jesus, Lord of the Church, **in your mercy, hear us.**

Merciful Creator,
accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ who taught us to pray saying: Our Father...

*from the Church of England's resource
Towards a Safer Church: Liturgical Resources*

Offertory

Giving is at the heart of our faith: God so loved the world that Jesus was given for its sake. Jesus poured out himself in love to his friends and, on the Cross, for us. The Holy Spirit gives us any number of graces to help us be faithful disciples. We respond to God's self giving love through our own attempts to follow, through loving service of others and through the giving of our financial offerings. We now pray for the gifts of grace and wisdom.

Giving God, You shower your blessings upon us,
giving us gifts to herald Your coming Kingdom;
give us the grace and wisdom we need to see Your light in the gloom,
to see through faith You at work in our midst.
Bring light and life to all.
Bless this money which we offer to you,
and help us to use it wisely that it too may be a sign of Your love. Amen.

Blessing

May the One whose realm shines like the stars at night,
the One who brings good news to the poor and downtrodden,
the One who brings love, life and laughter,
enable you to shine with the joy of the Kingdom,
encourage you to proclaim good news,
and energise you with divine healing,
and the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **or** Most High, Incarnate Word, and Flame of Love
be with you all, now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Christ's is the world in which we move		724		1163
We cannot measure how you heal	653	718	655	
We Do Not Hope to Ease Our Minds		537	717	
Heaven shall not wait		362	701	
The Kingdom of God	200		255	651
God's Spirit is in my heart	576		404	
Beauty for Brokenness		259	693	806
For the healing of the nations	620	706	696	
God of justice			699	1174
God Weeps		168	700	
In An Age of Twisted Values			703	
Christ Be Our Light		543	706	1201

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

You might also like to explore [Extol the God of Justice](#) where 7676D Wolvercote and Kings Lynn (O God of Earth and Altar) are suggested tunes and Alan Gaunt's [Lord if Faith is Disenchanted](#) where any 8787 tune will fit.

For opening music you might like to play Tracy's Chapman's Behind the Wall and for Closing music Suzanne Vega's Luka – both about domestic violence.