

Note

With a greater awareness in all denominations of the importance of safeguarding more and more congregations look to mark this in their worship. The third Sunday of November has been set aside by many churches as Safeguarding Sunday.

These notes enable local churches to construct a service using some of the Lectionary Readings for this Sunday but with a particular theme drawn from the valuable ministry of safeguarding which seeks to make the Church a safe space.

Liturgies which mark Safeguarding Sunday are, by their very nature, emotional. It might be a good idea to have some boxes of tissues around discretely placed around the Church and to have the details of your local safeguarding officer, or the details of your Synod Safeguarding Officer if there is no such person in your congregation on the Order of Service. You might also want to put a Women's Aid poster up (and keep it up) in the women's loos at your church. Often the loo is the only place a woman can get some privacy if she is in a controlling relationship. You might want to ensure that your Synod's Safeguarding notices are on display around your building – and are up to date!

The service needs to be led with care, gentleness, and an awareness that many stories remain untold. The aim of the service is to allow some healing, to raise the profile of the importance of safeguarding in the life of the church, to show that everyone needs to be kept safe, and to provide an awareness of where stories might be safely told.

Call To Worship

Be silent before the Lord our God!

For the Day of the Lord is coming when God will search out those who rest complacently ignoring the cries of the poor, the broken, and the wounded.

God will plunder their wealth; all that they hide behind will be laid waste!

Be silent before the Lord our God!

For the Day of the Lord is coming,

a day of wrath for abusers;

a day of distress and anguish for those who cover up crime;

a day of ruin and devastation for those who turn their backs on the suffering;

a day of darkness and gloom for those who deny realities;

a day of clouds and thick darkness for those who are complicit with evil!

Be silent before the Lord our God!

For the day of the Lord is coming,
a day when the fire of God's passion will burn brightly,
giving voice to the voiceless, speech to the silenced, words to the oppressed,
a day when evil stands silence and the righteous are heard!

Be silent before the Lord our God!

Come into God's presence with thanksgiving and hope.
For here we find healing, compassion, justice, and the courage to speak out!
Come, let us worship.

Prayers of Approach & Confession

O Eternal One,
we come to You, our dwelling place.
You give us security,
from everlasting to everlasting Your love empowers and changes us,
even though we are but dust in Your presence.
With You a thousand years are but a blink of Your eye, a short watch in the night.

As we come into Your presence, Risen Lord Jesus,
we become conscious of our sin and our need to turn from all that is evil;
 our silence in the face of evil,
 our cowardice in the face of might,
 our ignorance of our world's realities,
 our coldness in the face of need,
 and our failure to love.

We know that our secret sins will be revealed by the light of your countenance,
that we will be consumed by Your anger and overwhelmed by Your wrath,
unless we change our ways.

Teach us, Eternal Spirit,
to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart,
to see our world as it really is,
that we may turn away from evil and towards You,
and learn how to speak out and make a difference. Amen

Words of Forgiveness

The Most High gives grace
to those who turn away from their sins and back to righteousness.
The Everlasting gives strength
to those who wish to face up to what they've done.
The Eternal One gives freedom
to those who realise forgiveness is costly.

So, turn away from sin and back to God.
Face up to what you've done.
Embrace the cost of forgiveness and find freedom. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Let us be, O Most High,
good and trusty servants,
listening and understanding Your word to us
given in reading and sermon,
song and silence,
[bread and wine,]
and in each other
that we may listen, hear, and respond. Amen.

Readings

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18 | Psalm 90: 1 – 12 | St Matthew 25: 14 – 30

Sermon Notes

Zephaniah is a book full of dramatic reversals. God speaks in the first person whereas the prophet Zephaniah's voice is in the third person. God is portrayed as being angry – demanding silence and declaring the fate of the rich who have ignored both God and the poor amongst them. The Lord is angry due to the people's idolatry which has made true worship impossible and inauthentic. Zephaniah is clear that silence is the only possible appropriate response in the face of the Lord's anger. With cruel irony Zephaniah sees God preparing a sacrifice – in these times burnt offerings were given at the Temple in Jerusalem. Now God is, according to Zephaniah, making a sacrifice of the people and the "guests" who were the royal officials and the Temple's clergy. They have led the people astray and betrayed both their calling and God. Zephaniah proclaims a coming Day of the Lord – a day of wrath and distress, ruin and devastation, darkness, and gloom. In a startling reversal of the natural order of things wealth and status won't save the people. In the context of Safeguarding Sunday, we might wonder about the silence at the start of the passage. Silence is used as a weapon by abusers; silence can result from shame and fear. The breaking of silence is a powerful step on a journey to healing and justice. Yet, following this idea of reversals, some need to be silent. The abuser, those who cover up, those who turn blind eyes need to be silent in the face of righteous wrath. Hierarchs who excuse and move on abusive clergy have spoken too much. Police chiefs who excuse the actions of misogynist officers need to be silent in the face of women's anger. Those who abuse the elderly need to be silent in the face of the justice that awaits them.

Psalm 90: 1 – 12 The Psalms in the Lectionary are chosen to echo themes from the OT reading. Here the compilers have done a good job. The Psalmist continues the themes found in Zephaniah v7 notes God's anger and how our secret sins will be uncovered in the light of God's countenance. God's anger is counted against the insignificance of our days

in the eternal scheme of things. Yet the Psalm starts with ideas of hope too – the Lord is our dwelling place even though we are but dust. God’s eternal perspective is contrasted with ours. The Psalmist is trying to make sense of life – God exists from age to age whilst humans might last 70 or 80 years. In the context of Safeguarding Sunday, one might ponder how we find meaning and purpose in the face of abuse. Those who have survived abuse have to find ways to make sense of the world in the face of betrayal of trust, ruptured relationships, sometimes with feelings of low self-worth, breached boundaries, and intense anger. Harm can be perpetuated by Christians telling them to forgive their abuser – a forgiveness without repentance in and justice is cheap grace. The Psalmist offers hope in the uncovering of secret sins – we might read this with some fear, but justice comes with revelation. We dwell in the shelter of God’s presence but must remember that God is a god of justice and longs to bind up our wounds.

St Matthew 25: 14 – 30 The parable of the talents is often used to teach about stewardship, self-reliance, and the capitalist model of putting money to work to earn interest. Such interpretations are not helped by the transliteration of *talanta* from Greek into English. A talent in English is a gift or skill we have, a *talanta* in Greek was a huge sum of money; one talent would have been at least a year’s wages (the NIV’s translation of this as a bag of gold is more helpful). Given Matthew places this passage near the judgement of the sheep and the goats there’s an idea of money being used for relief of suffering not making a surplus. Indeed, Jewish law prohibits the lending of money with interest so one must wonder why, if the master was meant to be Jesus, why this would be lauded. Instead, we might think of Jesus being in the story as the third slave who wanted nothing to do with the economic and power systems of his master. The third slave who told the master the truth about himself “I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” In terms of Safeguarding Sunday, we might muse that the third slave, Christ, was punished for telling the truth, for breaking the silence. For speaking out the slave is thrown into “outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” If that’s where we end it’s a bit bleak. But the next verse starts the parable of the sheep and the goats where those who help the poor, despised and oppressed are given eternal life but those who ignore them – and surely the master in today’s story does just that – are sent to eternal fire. The slave would be sent to paradise not the outer darkness, the master would find his wealth won’t hide him from the consequences of his actions.

Weaving the threads together

We have themes of silence – the silence that will be demanded of those who abuse as they are made to listen to their crimes – and the silence of the abused that will one day be broken. We’ve the Psalmist who seeks to make sense of life just as those who have experienced abuse need to and we have the Christ figure of the third slave who speaks the truth regardless of the cost; the slave who won’t play the master’s games. Those games include having favourites – one slave is given a huge amount of money, another almost nothing. Abusers often pretend that those they abuse are their favourites. The

master rules on a whim – there’s no logic, no questioning, no resistance (until the end of the tale and then it’s punished). It’s easy to see this man as abusive, coercive and controlling. No wonder he reacts so badly to the slave who doesn’t play his games. And we’ve the theme of anger – the master’s anger at his slave not playing the game and God’s anger which burns against those who have betrayed him and wounded his people. We might preach from any of these themes but remembering that the parable of the talanta is finished in the parable of the sheep and the goats. Justice comes; it may not come quickly enough but it comes. We have to work for justice, to speak out God’s righteous anger, to uncover the things the powerful want to stay covered and to offer hope – hope that God’s justice will win through.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe that **from everlasting to everlasting You are God!**

Before the ages began You dreamt of justice and wholeness for all creation,
yet flawed humanity turned away from You,
preferring the selfishness of sin to righteousness living.

In the fullness of time, You became one of us to show that
from everlasting to everlasting You are God!

Jesus proclaimed freedom to the poor and oppressed,
spoke truth to power, breaking the silence of sin,
even though such truth telling drove him to the Cross.

In the depths of despair and the darkness of the tomb light burst forth on Easter Day,
bringing new life to Jesus and hope to the world that we might know that
from everlasting to everlasting You are God!

Jesus gave us Your Holy Spirit
to help us speak the truth, break the silence, and live as free people.
Throughout the ages the Spirit has moved us to freedom,
sustained us in sad times and enabled us to proclaim
from everlasting to everlasting You are God!

And now we wait for the Day when Jesus shall return.
Until then we live and work for the coming Kingdom,
where there are no secrets, where power is accountable
and where justice flows like a mighty river singing the mighty truth that
from everlasting to everlasting You are God. Amen.

Intercessions

Eternal One
we bring You our prayers and our praises along with our pain and our protests.
We thank You for the world in which we live,
the changing seasons, migrating birds,
fields and trees now almost dormant until the renewal of Spring comes,

and remember that when our lives seem stuck and dormant,
You are at work in our secret places bringing love and life.
We pray for all who work to keep us safe;
police officers, judges, magistrates and juries
who have to discern truth in difficult situations.
We pray for those who keep the Church safe –
safeguarding officers and those who administer complaints and discipline processes;
that our congregations will always be places of healing and wholeness,
places where the truth may be proclaimed and spoken,
houses of welcome and vitality.

pause

God, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Risen Lord Jesus,
we bring to You those in pain this day;
 those living with illness,
 those waiting for treatment,
 those whose pain is known to You alone.
You bore tremendous pain for daring to speak truth, even truth to power;
help us to speak truth to our leaders –
 truths about the health service and crumbling schools;
 truths about the criminal justice system;
 truths about exploitation and abuse;
 truths about the nature of power itself.

pause

God, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Most Holy Spirit,
You lead us into all truth.
Help us to know the truth of ourselves;
shine lights on our dark places,
that we may know even as You fully know us.
And when those truths are painful
give us courage to change and act
that we may find healing, wholeness and the ability to change.

pause

God, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Eternal Trinity,
hear the prayers we offer,
those we've spoken and those uttered in the silence of our hearts
as we bring them all to You now as we pray as Jesus taught saying **Our Father...**

Offertory

Since the earliest days God's people have given.
We've given in response to God;
 sometimes we've given of our talents,
 sometimes of our time,
 sometimes of our finances.
Sometimes this giving has been costly –
 we've given of our courage to tell the truth,
 we've given of our time by acting for justice,
 sometimes we've had to deal with resistance.
But still we give. Let us pray:

Eternal Majesty,
You shower us with good gifts to enable us to live as You intended.
Forgive us when we squander Your gifts;
bless these gifts we offer to You know,
that we may use them wisely,
and that our giving will keep this house of worship safe. Amen.

Blessing

May the One before whom we will one day stand silent,
give you the courage to speak the truth, even truth to power.

May the One whose truth telling sent him to the Cross,
teach you the costly nature of grace.

May the One who leads you into all truth,
give you self awareness, healing and wholeness.

And may the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit **or** *Eternal Majesty, Incarnate Word, and Eternal Spirit*
be with you,
all whom you love
and all whom you struggle to love
now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
<i>Justice</i>				
For the healing of the nations	620	706	696	
Freedom is coming			697	
God of justice			699	1174
God weeps		168	700	
Heaven shall not wait		362	701	
I Will Speak Out			702	
Christ be our light			706	1201
O God of Hope Your Prophets Spoke			708	
Show me how to stand for justice			713	
The right hand of God	91	709	715	
We do not hope to ease our minds		537	717	
<i>Healing</i>				
We Cannot Measure How You Heal	653	718	655	
God! When human bonds are broken	652		649	
Lord of Life we come to you		782	651	
Lord we come to ask your healing			652	
O Christ the Healer We Have Come		717	653	
The Love of God Comes Close	107		654	940

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