

Sunday 17th November
Proper 28 | Ordinary 33
Safeguarding Sunday
The Revd Andy Braunston

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.

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 act on 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 act on.

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

Will you make space for those who've been hurt and harmed?
With the help of God, we will.

Will you

Hymn Suggestions				
Christ's is the world in which we move	RS	CH4 724	StF	MP