

Enduring in the Work of Protecting Life

Isaiah 65:17–25 | 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13 | Luke 21:5–19

To safeguard is to love as God loves — faithfully, attentively, and without fear — until every person can live in safety, trust, and peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I still remember the quiet joy I felt after our Annual Chaplaincy Meeting this year. When the gathering had ended and most people were preparing to leave, Sandie came to me and said, “I’m ready to take the responsibility of being our Safeguarding Officer.” It was a simple sentence, yet it carried so much grace. In that moment, I felt something deeply hopeful — that our community is growing, not only in activity but in maturity and care. For safeguarding is not merely about compliance or policy. It is about people — about creating a community where everyone feels safe, valued, and protected. It is about life, about the heart of the Gospel itself.

In today’s Gospel, some people are admiring the beauty of the temple — its stones, its decorations, its grandeur. Then Jesus says something that must have startled them: “The days will come when not one stone will be left upon another.” He wasn’t simply predicting destruction. He was pointing to a truth that still speaks to us today: that even the most impressive structures can crumble when they forget their purpose. The temple was meant to be a place of prayer and safety, a dwelling of God’s presence, yet it had become a symbol of power and pride. And Jesus reminds them — and us — that holiness cannot live in walls alone; it must live in hearts that protect one another.

We have seen this truth in our own time. Across the Church, we have heard painful stories of failure — moments when trust was broken, when the vulnerable were not protected. The stones have fallen. But God, in mercy, rebuilds what is broken — not with marble or gold, but with honesty, compassion, and the courage to change. This is what safeguarding really is: not a burden, but a rebuilding of the temple of trust, a living sign that God’s love is real among his people.

And rebuilding trust is not only about addressing harms that have happened. It is also about shaping the kind of culture where harm becomes less and less possible. Every church has its own way of doing things — this is its culture. And a healthy church culture does not grow accidentally; it is something we cultivate together with intention and care. A safe culture listens well, because listening allows truth to be heard before wounds deepen. It communicates well, because clear and honest communication prevents confusion and secrecy. It manages power wisely, remembering that the power of Christ is always exercised in service and never in domination. It builds effective structures, so that people know where to raise concerns and how to respond. It establishes good governance, because accountability is a form of love. And it models safe behaviours, so that the Gospel we proclaim with our lips is visible in the way we treat one another. When a church grows in these six areas — listening, communicating, managing power, building structures, strengthening governance, and modelling safe behaviour — it becomes a place where trust can breathe again. It becomes a community that does not simply react to safeguarding concerns but embodies safeguarding as a way of living the Gospel each day.

Jesus goes on to describe turmoil — wars, earthquakes, betrayals, persecutions. It is easy to hear these words and feel afraid, yet Jesus says, “Do not be terrified... By your endurance you will gain your souls.” And that is the heart of safeguarding too: endurance. The work of keeping people safe is seldom spectacular. It is quiet, steady, patient work. It requires attentiveness, humility, and the courage to stay committed even when things become uncomfortable or demanding. But Jesus promises that in this endurance he will give us wisdom — wisdom that listens, wisdom that discerns, wisdom that acts with compassion rather than fear.

Isaiah offers us the vision that sustains this endurance. “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth... No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it.” This is God’s dream — a world where no one lives in fear, where every child is cherished, where every person is safe to grow, to trust, and to flourish. Every act of care, every boundary respected, every conversation that listens deeply — these become small pieces of that new creation. They become glimpses of God’s holy mountain where, as Isaiah

says, “they shall not hurt or destroy.” Here in our chaplaincy, every effort to create a safe space — every decision made with care, every person respected — becomes part of that mountain of joy and peace.

Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, reminds the community not to grow idle but to remain faithful in their shared responsibilities. He speaks of work done quietly, honestly, and without burdening others. And this too is part of safeguarding. Responsibility cannot rest on one officer, or one priest, or one committee. It belongs to all of us. Safeguarding is a shared ministry — a daily expression of discipleship. It is what holiness looks like in ordinary life: not grand gestures, but the consistent practice of respect, vigilance, and kindness.

Jesus also tells his disciples, “This will give you an opportunity to testify.” In the same way, whenever the Church commits itself to safeguarding, it testifies to the Gospel. It tells the world that Christ’s love protects rather than harms, that his power heals rather than controls, that his Church is a home for restoration and not a hiding place for hurt. This is our witness: not only through our preaching, but through the kind of community we choose to be.

And so today, as we mark Safeguarding Sunday, we give thanks for the willingness of people in our chaplaincy to take on this responsibility, and for the growing spirit of care among us. But we also renew our promise — to stand with one another, to watch over one another, to listen well, and to ensure that no one is left unseen or unsafe. Because safeguarding is not the work of a few; it is the calling of the whole Church.

At the end of the Gospel, Jesus speaks with such tenderness: “Not a hair of your head will perish.” What a beautiful image of God’s attentive love — the God who counts every hair, who sees every hidden pain, who keeps watch over each of us. And that is the heart of safeguarding: to reflect that same attentive love. When we protect one another, we are living the very nature of God. We are saying to one another, “You matter. Your life is precious. You are safe here.”

Amen.