



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

Sermon Podcast

Sunday 16th November 2025

Safeguarding Sunday: love in truth and action

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Readings:

Psalm 91

1 John 3: 16-24

John 15: 9-17

“Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” These are words from the first letter of John. They are words of exhortation to the early Christian community about how to be faithful disciples, how to be a faithful church. It is all about love that goes beyond words into truth and action.

Sunday the 16th of November, for many people, is being marked as Safeguarding Sunday. Safeguarding has at its heart a longing for all people to be safe, protected, welcomed and cared for within our churches and in wider society. Safeguarding is an integral part of the ministry and mission of our churches, it is a core part of how we are church. But more than this - to borrow the words from the first letter of John - Safeguarding is about love in truth and action. As we seek to love and serve our neighbours in our communities, we are called to be places and spaces where there is a healthy culture of interactions and relationships. We need to take our call to love one another seriously. We also need to take our call to live truthfully seriously. Over the past few years, the Church of England has been called to account for its Safeguarding failures. As an institution, we are on a journey: there is always more work to be done and more lessons to learn and there is a constant need for us to lament and repent of our failings. As a Church, we need to acknowledge our failings, learn from the past, and listen and respond to victims and survivors with humility. We need to love in truth and action.

If this Safeguarding Sunday prompts any safeguarding concerns or raises any safeguarding issues you would like to discuss, please contact your Parish Safeguarding Officer or get in touch with our Diocesan Safeguarding Team. You can find their contact details on the Diocesan website: www.chelmsford.anglican.org under the safeguarding tab.

Psalm 91 is titled in some Bibles “The assurance of God's protection”. Here we have the familiar poetic language of the Psalms. This psalm identifies the ways that God protects and so shows something of the characteristics and the nature of God. God is portrayed as a strong fortress, offering a place of refuge, where we are shielded and protected. The Psalmist has confidence in God and in God's protection. *“I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will*

answer them. I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honour them.” These words offer consolation and assurance to many. But there is a tension here. This is not everyone’s experience. Many people in our communities and in our churches live daily with physical, emotional, mental and spiritual scars of abuse. For them, the images and language in this Psalm may not be helpful, the promises may sound hollow. They have known the “terrors of the night” and evil has befallen them. This Psalm does not offer consolation and assurance. The truth of who God is has been marred for them. They need to turn elsewhere in the book of Psalms for their lived experiences to be given a voice. Alongside the poetry of this psalm is a challenge for the people of God - the church - to be people and spaces and places where this description of God and this kind of protection and assurance is shown and known. There is also a challenge to sit with those for whom this Psalm (and other passages of scripture) are problematic and to not diminish or dismiss what this is like for them.

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Love and friendship. This is what is at the heart of this passage from John’s Gospel. *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* Jesus is talking to his friends the night before he dies. The night before he laid down his life for his friends. The night before he was crucified. And he speaks of love and friendship. Through Jesus, God relates to us in love and friendship. And this is how Jesus wants us to relate to others. *“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”* Jesus’ primary action is to love: not to judge, condemn, criticise, belittle or dismiss. He loves. A love that goes beyond boundaries and that is without agenda. A love that is about equality and mutual respect. A love that refuses power and abuse; that washes tired, dirty feet. A love that lets everyone sit down to eat. Even those he knows might betray him to his enemies; even those who might deny they know him; even those who might fall asleep when he asks them to keep watch for just one hour.

In John’s Gospel, faithful discipleship is known by love. Jesus calls upon his disciples to mirror the love that God has for him and the love that he has for the Father and for his disciples. To lay down one’s life is to put the needs of others

before our own, to live for the good of others, to make time for them, to be present for them in times of trouble and crisis, to listen to them, to witness to their hurts. *“Love one another as I have loved you.”* Following Jesus means taking love seriously. The first letter of John stresses this. Thought to be written by the author of John’s Gospel, we encounter familiar phrases, *“We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us... love one another just as he commanded us... all who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them.”*

The first letter of John also compels us to live truthfully. This means going beyond addressing issues of harm and abuse and protecting against them. It means being willing to face hard truths, to stand with victims of injustice and - if required - to speak up and out with them and for them. We know that abuse devastates lives, that it has and does take place in the church and that its consequences are profound and long-lasting. The task of Safeguarding is to acknowledge this hard truth and to do everything possible to ensure that abuse no longer happens, now or in the future. In all that we do, particularly in balancing our responsibilities, we must continually seek to place survivors and victims at the heart of our concern. We long to be a refuge for the hurting and vulnerable, and to do this we must listen to those who feel voiceless and empower everyone in our communities to remain safe, within their families, places of work and of worship. *“Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”* Jesus’ command to love as he loves is an invitation into relationships of profound mutuality and interdependence. These kind of relationships contribute to healthy communities, modelled on the example of Christ’s own humility and sacrifice. This is a way of being that says, who I am is caught up in who you are. We are members together of the same body of people. Whatever affects one of us affects all of us. We are all God’s children; Jesus calls us all friends; we are all brothers and sisters. So, if I am your sister, your brother, I have a responsibility for how I behave towards you and that has implications for the choices I make about how I live and love in the world.

As we anticipate the feast of Christ the King next week, we are reminded that the kingdom of God is not for the strong but the weak; it is not for the rich but for the

poor; it is not for the powerful but for the powerless; it is not for the proud but for the meek. The Church is where the least, the lost and the broken - all God's children - should be able to find the safest of places in a loving community that lives out its faith in truth and action.

Dear God,
help us to be a church
that loves, welcomes, protects,
listens, learns, serves,
repents, restores, transforms,
values, cares, believes.
God of justice and compassion,
hear our prayer.
Help us , heal us, guide us, we pray,
in Jesus' name. Amen.