

## **Script for Diocesan Safeguarding Service – Archdeacon Nicky 18/11/24**

As we gather here today on this Safeguarding Sunday, our hearts and minds can't help but be troubled and heavy in the light of the findings of the Makin Report. We are shocked and disturbed by the long-maintained conspiracy of silence about the heinous abuses of John Smyth. We are ashamed of the institutional failures of the Church of England and many of its senior clergy.

As Archbishop Justin has resigned and prepares to step down, we can't help but wonder what comes next? How will we continue to learn from the mistakes of the past? What might the future of the Church look like?

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that God's plan is always to give us a future and a hope. The two Bible readings we've read today help us to think about what that future and that hope might look like and how we might contribute to bringing God's plans and purposes to fruition.

God's desire is that all people might know his love and come to live within his kingdom. The kingdom of God which is good news for all. The way into that kingdom is open for all who will enter by putting their faith and trust in Jesus, the one who died that we might have life.

In our liturgy, we sometimes talk about Jesus' death as opening his arms for us upon the cross – a gesture of welcome, invitation and drawing us in. When you watch a priest presiding at the eucharist, the sleeves of our vestments look very much like wings. That is imagery which the psalmist picks up in our first reading today, Psalm 91:1-4.

God offers us the opportunity to live within his kingdom, to find shelter under his protection. To lean upon his strength, and rest in the shadow of his wings, to be truly and deeply safe and secure. God's kingdom sets us free from anything that would enslave us as God's perfect love casts out our fear and helps us grow into wholeness and fullness of life. God's desire for us is that we will flourish and thrive and become the people we were created to be.

Our Diocesan Vision is nothing less than a vision of the kingdom of God. In our different roles and responsibilities, we are seeking to be good news for all the people God sends our way. In all our churches across the diocese, we are creating safe spaces where people can flourish and thrive and live out their God-given calling. Knowing that we are loved beyond measure by God in Christ, we are learning to love without measure or restraint.

As we reflect on the faithfulness of God and remember with gratitude all he has done for us, our love for him grows, our relationship with him deepens and that love overflows into service of our local contexts. And when we see things around us that are not how God wants them to be we try and find a way to speak out and challenge injustice. And as we do that, other people are impacted and affected and we pray that as they encounter Christ in us and between us and through us, that they too will become disciples and their lives are transformed by Christ.

Today as we gather, it is good to remember that the work we do in safeguarding is absolutely central to all we are and do and to helping our churches reflect the life, values and vision of God's kingdom.

Thank you for the part that you are playing. It is good that our amazing safeguarding team are here today and we thank God for the faithful and diligent way in which they serve us. But, as we all know, safeguarding is everyone's responsibility- though without some really committed volunteers who are willing to devote their time, energy and focus their ministry around this area, our churches would be less safe and people would be at risk.

The work that our churches are doing in safeguarding is often unseen and unnoticed. No-one knows how much time is spent updating Parish dashboards. No-one (other than our trainer Nick Harding) sees the thousands of individuals sitting on their laptops completing their training. No-one is there in the middle of the night when you can't get to sleep because something traumatic has occurred and you've been part of the Case Management Meeting trying to find ways of moving forward.

But God sees all those things. His arms of love surround and enfold you, his wings are spread over you giving you protection and shade. His strength helps you to stand and be strong. He catches your tears in a bottle and treasures it for ever. So you are never on your own – God is always with you and has promised to never leave or forsake you. His grace is sufficient, his power is perfected in weakness and his mercies are new every morning for great is his faithfulness. And can I encourage you to allow our Safeguarding team to help and support you too for that is what they are there for. And as well as that professional help and support, can I encourage you to offer peer support to one another through the PSO network and make the most of the resources available to you.

Part of being human is accepting that no-one is perfect, we are all fallen, we all make mistakes, we all need help and we all need God's forgiveness. As we remember with gratitude all who work within our churches supporting the work of Safeguarding, we pray for the ways in which we as individuals, and our Church as an institution, has failed in our duty to protect people. And failed in our calling to love as we have been loved and provide a safe place for all to thrive. We need to learn from those failures and do everything in our power to move forward in the way God wants us to be.

For those who have been the cause of pain, we pray that the love of God will show them the error of their ways and grant them the grace to repent and change, and opportunities to atone and make amends, where that is appropriate and possible. And for all perpetrators we ask that God will convict them of their sin and change their hearts.

And as we close, I invite you to hold before God all survivors and especially those who have suffered as a result of the failings of our Church. Each one is a unique individual made in God's image, known and loved by God, infinitely precious and treasured by him. Let us commit ourselves to praying for them, for their healing and protection and that they might encounter the love of God and find safety in the shadow of his wings.