



A safe community

w/c 17 November 2024

This week's study is a follow-up to Safeguarding Sunday which we followed in our service this week. Let's begin by reflecting on the need for such events in words from the Christian safeguarding charity Thirtyone:eight, who run the Safeguarding Sunday initiative, in their introduction to this year's campaign:

"Defending the rights of vulnerable people is integral to Christian faith and teaching. Sadly, the church hasn't always done this well. But we have a chance to change that. We are already seeing many churches take the responsibility to safeguard those in their care seriously."

If you're wondering where their name comes from, it's a simple reminder of God's command to us in Proverbs 31:8 – *"Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable."* (CEB) Deriving from this verse, they see three important functional and practical aspects of any outworking of a theology of safeguarding:

- Advocacy for vulnerable people
- Defending the rights of vulnerable people
- Dignifying the destitute

How might we embed such ideas into our life together at St James?

Read Romans 12:9–21 and Matthew 18:1–14

Safeguarding' can easily be reduced to processes and procedures, checks and training etc. However, at its heart are the Christian values of loving our neighbour as ourselves. Church as a safe space is one of the greatest witnesses we can offer the world. We should therefore see safeguarding not as a burden, but rather a joy. And why – because of what it says about us and what it facilitates for the church's mission.

In the light of what you learned on Sunday and the ideas from our readings, you may want to think through some or all of the following questions, hopefully focussing on their practical outcomes for us at St James:

What makes St James a safe place? Remember that this is not limited to our work with children but also encompasses any who may be vulnerable which might include – but is not limited to – the elderly and anyone subject to domestic abuse.

What makes someone vulnerable?

Even accounting for the often-used Jewish tendency toward hyperbole, why do think Jesus was so stark in his statements about penalties outlined in Matthew 18:6–9?

Why is it important that St James not only **is** a safe place but is **known** to be a safe place?

How do we balance stopping bad things with acting positively to improve the lot of the disadvantaged?

Why do think that as far as safeguarding goes, it has often been said that the most dangerous words we can ever say are *"it could never happen here"*?

"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it."
(1 Corinthians 12:26)