

Sermon for Safeguarding Sunday 2025

In the end, it is all about love. We worship a God of love. A love so vast, so generous, so courageous, that God in Jesus gave up everything to live among us and show us what God is like. A love so relentless that while we were mired in sin and selfishness and error, Jesus suffered and died for us. And then because that love was stronger than anything in all creation, stronger than death itself, Jesus rose again, burst from the tomb as one of our communion prayers put it. Death may continue to do its worst, but we know it is defeated and all have hope because of the immeasurable love of God.

That's the God we worship. That's the gospel we proclaim. And if you happen to have wandered through these Cathedral doors this morning wondering what we are all about, well that's it. We are all about God. We are all about love. We would love to tell you more over coffee.

And it is because we are all about that love that we are marking Safeguarding Sunday today. Safeguarding is the work of love. It is how we care for one another and for the people we encounter whether within the Cathedral precincts or when we are out being God's people wherever God has placed us. When the Christian Church was less than 200 years old, before creeds and councils, before an agreed canon of scripture, Christians were known by their love. Tertullian the Church Father wrote:

But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another...

Christians worship a God who is love. They should be known by their love. And safeguarding is a work of love.

Because of this, we have written a new safeguarding vision. It can be easy to get cynical about vision statements. Everyone has them these days. But we wanted to make it absolutely clear that safeguarding is core to who we are here is Coventry Cathedral. And so my wonderful colleague Nitano wrote down in the words he is so gifted at crafting the reasons why safeguarding sits at the heart of who we are and what we do. The full statement is in your order of service, and I advise you to spend some time reading it this week.

There's so much to unpack in it. I think my favourite line is *Safeguarding is more than policy – it is a sacred trust, woven into the fabric of our worship, mission, events and hospitality. It is a sacred expression of our calling to love our neighbour.* Amen, amen and amen.

But I want to draw your attention to some other parts of that vision today. Cornel West once said that justice is love made visible. Our epistle of John says, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. Love is not something that we feel – it is something we do. And our vision says quite a lot about what we will do.

It says that we pledge to remain vigilant, informed, and responsive. What does that look like in everyday life? Well actually, a lot of it looks like good training. Training that helps us know when something might be a safeguarding situation – that tunes our antennae to pick up subtle signs there is a problem. Training also helps us know what to do when we get that niggly that something isn't quite right. And sometimes people will say to me: "Why do I need to do this training? I only volunteer to fix chairs or serve coffee. I am not working with children or vulnerable adults." But training isn't just for those who work directly with those groups. Training is so that everyone in our community can spot safeguarding problems and do something to help. Perhaps you are walking through the cathedral with your toolkit on the way to help with a bit of maintenance and you spot someone speaking to a child in a concerning way. Training will help you recognise it as a problem and know how to respond well. Or perhaps you are sitting having coffee after the service and someone starts talking about their home life, and it sounds a bit weird. Your training might help you spot early signs of domestic abuse and know what next steps to take. Or maybe you are nowhere near the Cathedral but a friend tells you that they are a bit worried about their teenage child who has been behaving strangely. And because you have been at safeguarding training, you know about County Lines and how criminals target and exploit young people to ferry drugs and money around the country for them, and you can signpost your friend to somewhere to get some advice. You could be the one person who is able to help someone in a very difficult and dangerous situation. You could make a difference. And that is why we train all our volunteers to recognise signs of abuse and know what to do next. Being willing to give up a few hours of your time to ensure you can help when it is needed looks an awful lot like love to me.

Our vision also says we will seek to uphold the highest standards of care, accountability, and transparency. Well, what does that look like in everyday life? Upholding high standards of care looks like striving to do the very best we can, not begrudgingly doing what we must. It is about constantly asking ourselves how we can care better for the people we encounter as congregation, choir, volunteers, staff and visitors. For many years the church has been seen as the poor relation in terms of safeguarding, languishing behind our secular colleagues in education, healthcare and policing. Thankfully things have changed a lot in the past decade and we have improved drastically. But if safeguarding is a work of love, and love is our business, then we want to be leading the way.

And then, we seek to be accountable and transparent. That means we want to have a really healthy culture. We want people to be able to speak up if they think something's not right and know that we won't be angry with them. In fact we are going to be grateful they had the courage to tell us. We are going to be curious about how we do things – are they working? What could we do better? If we have got things wrong, well, we are going to try not to be defensive, but rather to be open to learning and improving our practice. We are definitely not going to cover things up or brush them under the carpet.

So let's back up a little bit and look at our gospel reading for today. You might think that I have chosen the reading about the lost sheep and the lost coin because God loves the victims and survivors who need good safeguarding care. And of course God loves them! Of course, of course, of course! But that's not why I chose those readings. Because these readings are not about victims and survivors who have done nothing wrong and been hurt. These readings are about sinners and the lengths to which God will go to get them back on track. Sometimes love looks like having courageous conversations to help people know when they haven't got things right and being willing to put in the hard work and effort to make things better.

To have a really healthy culture, we need everyone's help. Now I know that some members of the community will have absolutely no problem with coming to me and saying: "Hi Kate – I have an idea of something we could be doing better". I know this because I have been here four months and some of you have done that already. Some more than once. And this is GOOD! Thank you! Keep it up. But for others, it is far from comfortable to come up to a clergyperson and give them feedback. Maybe you are from a church background or a culture where that isn't the done thing. And if that is you, I need you to be brave. If you spot a problem, speak up. And the Dean, Nitano, Simon and I, we will try really hard to listen and respond well.

And then all of us need to practice that same undefendedness. Because it's not just the leadership who get things wrong. Any one of us could behave in ways that aren't healthy, or that cause other people to feel uncomfortable. We are humans and all of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. God still loves us. We still love one another. But if we love one another, we will have the courage to try and sort things out. At the time, it might not feel like love. It will probably feel pretty rubbish, but if we didn't love one another we wouldn't bother.

Love. Love is what it is all about and safeguarding is one way of putting that love into action.

So, my final point. This cathedral is full of people who love our choral music, but I am hoping that at least some of you will be Meatloaf fans. In which case, you will be able to finish this song title: I would do anything for love...

But I won't do that.

My experience of the Church is that we can sometimes be a little like that Meatloaf song when it comes to safeguarding. We are generally caring and generous people. We want to make the world a better place. We will do anything for love, but we won't do that. We won't give up that hour for training. We won't fill out that form and raise that concern. We won't take that bit of difficult feedback and try to learn from it. "We are people of love – we don't need to be told how to care for one another" has been the Church's approach for far too long. But if we are people of love, if we want – just like those first Christians to be known for

our love, then like Olympic athletes training for a gold medal, we will put in every effort, make every sacrifice to be and do better.

God is love and we are called to be people of love. So once again, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. In our first reading it says: we know love by this, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. A couple of hours training, a slightly uncomfortable conversation are a far cry from laying down your life, but they are a way of showing Jesus' love. Let's do it. Let's love in truth and action and make this Cathedral a place where safeguarding is just what we do, and what we do with commitment and - yes – love.