

May these words be pleasing. Amen.

This is my warm, mucky, high-vis coat. I use it when working around the engines on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway. By wearing bright orange we keep ourselves *safe* (we can be seen) and we take on the *identity* of someone working on the railway, working in the shed, working on the line.

Can I show you three pictures of the same engine? In this one the engine looks in a very sorry state. It's not the way that it was designed. To get it back into a fit state to run will take, did take, a huge of time, effort and money.

But it did get restored, back to its factory settings (if you like) and it looks rather splendid.

One final picture of the same locomotive with one of our choristers

There was a time when the pressing need for change was over safeguarding against accidents at work and at home, both for the rich and for the poor; hard hats, high vis, health and safety rules and regulations at work, at home, and in public places; keeping us all safe

When we think of safeguarding today we tend to think of protecting the vulnerable in society from deliberate acts of harm; acts which clearly are not part of our God's plan. All of us will find ourselves vulnerable from time-to-time but *some* adults and *all* children are always vulnerable. God calls all of *us* to protect the weak and the needy.

I am enormously grateful to Martin for giving me this slot. Safeguarding, or a lack of safeguarding, affected me as a child growing up in the church.

Safeguarding is clearly important to others. I've never had people asking me to include a message in the sermon. But a few people, knowing that this would be Safeguarding Sunday, have hoped that I might include a particular point that is important to them. Can I give you two examples?

The first is from Jan. 'Please can you remind people that Safeguarding is everyone's business?' Jan is this church family's designated safeguarding officer and works within our safeguarding committee with Martin. This is a simple and common message. Here it is from the diocesan website. And if you ever travel on a train you will recognise this frequent message: See it, say it, sorted. Note that it's *not* see it, say it, sort it. Instead we are to tell the experts whose job it is to sort it. We are not to presume to sort it out on our own. Too often there have been well meaning people, or lazy people, who have botched it or bottled it or hidden it. Every school has at least one designated officer, Richmond School has four. Here in church if you or I have concerns Jan and Martin must be told, and they have people *they* can seek help from.

Martin picked out (for me) important phrases from the resources sent through for Safeguarding Sunday. I'll let you read them.

(1st slide – P. 2nd slide – fine. The world needs this message of healing, love, and true identity. We know that there are those who seek to damage; to seek to belong to groups in which there are vulnerable people. The church, schools, scouts, swimming clubs, athletics clubs, football clubs, Oxfam, Samaritans, charities, the police, the metropolitan police. Third slide. This slide is more challenging. There is a small number of people but not an insignificant number

who've been hurt by the church and whose lives will never be the same again. Their response to such a statement can be deep anger. Even if they still accept the heart of the message of Christ they will struggle to accept that *our church* represents this message. And it is the message of healing and love and true identity; an identity that can be restored, unblemished from all the damage others have done to us and we do to ourselves.

So who is this brave bishop, Jonathan Gibbs? He is one of our bishops here in the Diocese of Leeds, Bishop of Huddersfield (smiley). He is also the national church's lead safeguarding bishop. He has also shared with us that *he* experienced (to use his words) 'childhood trauma', the impact of which resonates and fluctuates many years later. This is important. With the greatest respect to Jonathan his wounds are a gift to us and the church. If a person damaged by the church can still find the church to be a place in which God can be found, a church in which healing is still possible, a church that worships a God who restores true identity, then our church has usefulness and value; as we say, 'keep hold of that which is good'.

When I have spoken and sometimes written about safeguarding and abuse one point seems to resonate with people. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult *I would never become the person I would be*. But I am still and you are still made in the image of God. For now we see God as if looking in a mirror. It's a murky image and it's got all sorts of other DNA mixed in: Damage, Negativity, Arrogance. We bear the scars of damage others have done us, the scars of the memories of the things we have done to others, and all those things we have done to ourselves.

Christ represents the healing God. If Christ does not come then we are to remain in the dark locked room, scared and alone. But he comes! If Christ comes with false healing, he didn't die, he didn't suffer, there was no resurrection, then our preaching and our church is a worthless platitude built on sand, it is false healing. But Christ has died, Christ is come, and it is most important that he comes again, and again still bearing the scars. He has to with us in suffering if he is to be with us in healing. He has to bear his scars as we bear ours if he is going to help us restore that image of God in us and in others, if we are all to find our true identity.

I want to draw together some recent themes. Before I do that, however, a reminder of where to find the important contact details for support. We have plenty of information and contact details on our own website (under safeguarding) and it links also to the diocesan website that has even more important information and where to get support.

Recent themes: Harvest, gratitude, generosity, and the importance of this church family and its worship. 21 years ago we came here and we will always be grateful for the generous welcome of this church family. When we came I've been supported in my reader ministry, there's the three w's of the study groups (weird, whacky, wonderful). It was here that I regained my singing voice after a loss of 20 years. The three boys – to see them nurtured and encouraged by this their church family. Alastair, last weekend, began his new life in Liverpool and has already rung the massive bells at Liverpool Cathedral using the skills learnt here at St Marys. And Gillian; 20 years ago, painfully shy, far too nervous to, in any way, be in the spotlight. Next year she is due to be ordained and if any church can claim to be a sending church it is this one, St Marys Richmond. This is a place where we can and I think we do help each other find that image of God within, continue on a journey of healing and in our desire to keep hold of that which is good and share and grow that which is good we aspire to make this family a family where all are welcome. Amen.