

Sermon Safeguarding Sunday 16/11/25

Psalm 91, James 2:

Evil under the sun. It's the title of an Agatha Christie classic detective story, set on an island where the sun shone. It was filmed on Burgh Island in Devon with David Suchet playing the detective, Hercule Poirot. We went to a wedding on the island, accessible by causeway at low tide, but when the tide is in you travel on a strange vehicle called a sea tractor, like a sort of cage on long wheeled legs.

You may be wondering what my purpose is of this travelogue this morning, but I wanted to contrast the peaceful sunlit island with its unusual Art Deco hotel where we attended the wedding, with our journey over the sea in the dark on this strange tractor. At night there is something spooky, it is the darkness not of the town but of the country, you can hear but not see the water beneath you, and the noise of the waves is more sinister than gentle. But in the Christie story it is not at night that the murder is committed but during the heat of the day.

In psalm 91 as we are promised God's protection, we are also warned in an oblique way that the things which harm us can come at any time, the terror of night, the arrow that flies by day, pestilence that stalks in the darkness or plagues that destroy at midday. It is not always the obvious of which we should be afraid. Or the obvious place from which help will come when we need it. Things are so often not what they seem. When we talk with the children at school they frequently mention the story of the good Samaritan. They usually comment on the inaction of the officials, and the practical help of the stranger. In that story it is the attitude of the characters rather than their position that drive their actions.

Of course, the traveller in that story is vulnerable. You don't have to be very old or very young. Let's not forget that we are all vulnerable at times even if only as we succumb to a bout of flu or come to the end of an exhausting week. We all want to feel that God's protection is in place to protect us from whatever.

James is directing his letter rather generally to 'tribes scattered among the nations,' but his message in today's passage is clear and simple. Don't be content to 'talk the talk'. Don't just say that you are doing something, actually do it. If people need help – then help.

His examples are straightforward. If someone is cold because they have no clothes, don't tell them to keep warm, give them the means to keep warm. None of us would have wanted to find ourselves in Abraham's shoes with God telling us to sacrifice our own child but Abraham knew that it was what God expected of him, and his actions reflected his faith, and were rewarded at the end. He did what he knew was right even though it was so much what he did not want to do. James makes it clear that we should

act upon what our faith tells us to do, that without the actions there is nothing to show for the faith.

And how does all this relate to us and to safeguarding within our church?

Our readings this morning contain two powerful messages for a day when we are thinking about our role in safeguarding. Not Sue and Judith's roles alone but all our responsibilities, because we are all in this. If we are to provide a safe church community in which all people can feel comfortable and welcome, we must all contribute to this. We all need to be alert to possible issues that may conflict with that welcome or, actually be, inappropriate. The message that we hear on public transport is so poignant – if it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

And we must be prepared to take action in a variety of ways. To respond positively to any requests to raise our awareness, to challenge unsafe practice, to report what we feel uncomfortable about confidentially and through the proper channels. Remember the psalm? God promises us his protection, that includes protecting us when we have done the right thing, but others may not agree. He will provide us with support as we try to fathom out what is the right thing.

Our willingness to do the right thing is indicative of the strength of our relationship with God and our understanding of what that really means in practice. It is also indicative of our relationship with the other members of our community, that we really do have the best interests of everyone at heart. By our actions we show our real intentions, it takes us beyond saying the right things, or being in the right places. In our deeds we display our humanity towards others.

Which brings us back to the Good Samaritan and his focus on helping a stranger in need, someone who had been made vulnerable by circumstances. The Samaritan saw only the circumstances the need to help, to take action. It is a story described by a writer in the Church Times this week as a story whose theme is relationship, evidenced by both love and action, and how you cannot have one without the other. (Jayne Manfredi – Church Times 31/10/25)