



The Church of England
Diocese of Ely

From the Bishop of Huntingdon
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Dear Friends

You will have heard of last week's publication of the Makin Review into the handling of John Smyth's acts of abuse over many years. Any of us who have read even only parts of the Review, will be sickened and saddened beyond words, also angered, both by the abuse and by the failings in our church in effective safeguarding.

For some of you, I know, the Review and its subject matter will have been personally painful, triggering memories of abuse you may have experienced yourself, and this is true also for members of our congregations.

Please bear in mind, in thought, prayer and appropriate action, those who have been harmed. If you are looking for support for yourself or someone you know, please look at the links here: [Publication of the Makin Report - Diocese of Ely](#)

At times like this, one might wonder: "How can I serve a church like this?" This kind of moral trauma to the church's faithful servants is part of the wickedness of what has happened. Yet, God has not changed and God's call on us has not changed. Sometimes, ministry is called out of us, even dragged out of us, by God's love and others' needs. When we think of victims and survivors, when we look at the faithfulness of so many in our congregations and communities, we realize they need us to put our hand to the plough, to care and work for a better way. They deserve our commitment to safeguarding and to the implementation of the Review recommendations, our support of our Parish Safeguarding Officers and our Diocesan Safeguarding Team, and they deserve theological and spiritual leadership that loves the truth and cares deeply.

This Sunday is Safeguarding Sunday (see [here](#) for some ideas). It is a good opportunity to lend your support to the work of safeguarding in our church: specifically, to an integrated culture of safeguarding as part of what we do because it is Gospel work and a Kingdom value.

Here are a few 'starters for 10', some of which may stimulate thoughts for your preaching.

If you follow the Revised Common Lectionary, the Gospel is Mark 13:1-8.

"Look Teacher, what large stones." We are easily impressed. And the Temple in Jerusalem was hugely impressive, towering over Jerusalem. Of course, in the first instance, there is

nothing wrong with being impressed. Temples, cathedrals, churches are built to point to God's glory and to draw us to praise, adoration and worship, pointing us to what is so much greater than we are, so much greater than our lives. And we are right to give thanks for those who have gone before us who have had the vision, inspiration and will to build a house of faith in order to share visibly the news of God's presence with us.

Jesus makes a different point here: he draws attention to the fallibility of all these things, not least religious things, the mistake that what is there in order to point to God is mistaken for divine itself. Looking for something big, apparently strong and immediately visible is a mistake easily made in times of fear, anxiety and uncertainty. In our strange Gospel passage from Mark, Jesus in his age of anxiety prophesies about various geopolitical crises. Small wonder that there is a sense in which this speaks into our situation of fear and uncertainty about the future today. We know many people today are looking for strong ideologies, strong positions - and of course for strong leaders (though not ones that look like one crucified).

On this Safeguarding Sunday, this serves as a healthy reminder how **un**healthy it is to build up the myth of the flawless leader – the flawless leader who, because he or she speaks amazingly and does wonderful things, can't possibly have also spoken or acted inappropriately or plain wrongly. It is particularly important to be alert how emotional and spiritual responses elicited ("what large stones", "what a wonderful leader" ...) can be fertile ground for abuse of power and minimisation of such abuse when not coupled with healthy systems of accountability and a culture in which no one is beyond criticism and reproach, embedded in clear processes that are fair to everyone.

Leaders who encourage this are indeed like those mentioned in the OT reading from Daniel 12:1-3: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."

And finally, the Epistle, Hebrews 10:11-18.19-25, concludes with three instructions:

- to be clear about our hope because it is anchored in Christ, who unlike any other is the one who is ultimately faithful (v23);
- to provoke one another to love and good deeds (v24): think of this as being about creating a good culture of deep care for others, the deep care that is at the heart of Safeguarding;
- to encourage one another through a commitment to the community of faith (v25): on Safeguarding Sunday, this is a good opportunity to encourage from the pulpit your Parish Safeguarding Officer as well as gently but firmly urging your congregation to grow that culture of deep care with safeguarding and underpin this by supporting the work of their PSO and the requirements of safeguarding training.

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Allow me an afterword:

In my November letter, I omitted to mention the upcoming **Preacher's Study Day: Introducing Luke's Gospel, on Thursday, 28th November** at Etheldreda House. Speakers

are Isabelle Hamley, James Blandford-Baker and Alex Hughes, with an introduction by me. Full details with timetable and themes, and to book, please see [here](#).

In these times that seem so extraordinarily turbulent on different fronts, we remember those who are living through "birth pangs" (Mk 13:8).

God bless us with courage, humility and love, that we may share this blessing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Hughes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards.