**Safeguarding Sunday: Love Protects**

*Psalm 91; James 2:14-26; 1 John 3:16-24*

Churches are built on trust, welcome, fellowship, and community. These are beautiful gifts. Yet when boundaries become unclear, when power and authority are misused, or when concerns are ignored or covered up, those same gifts can become sources of harm. Thankfully, from what I know and hear, our church community here in Heidelberg has not experienced such serious challenges. Yet safeguarding is not merely a response to problems. It is a commitment to ensuring that every person who enters this church is welcomed, valued, respected, and kept safe. Many churches have shared positive experiences arising from Safeguarding Sunday services. In the materials prepared by Thirtyone:eight,[1] I came across the testimony of a survivor of church abuse. She recalled hearing a vicar say during a Safeguarding Sunday service, "You really matter, and what happened to you matters." Those simple words changed her life. For the first time, she felt seen, heard, and understood. They gave her the courage to disclose abuse she had experienced in a previous church.

The purpose of Safeguarding Sunday is precisely this: to remind us that Christian love protects life. St Paul beautifully describes love in 1 Corinthians 13: "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." Notice the phrase: "Love always protects." That simple statement captures the heart of safeguarding. Churches may have inspiring sermons, vibrant worship, excellent children's ministry, exciting youth programmes, and numerous activities. Yet if we fail to protect people from harm, we have failed in our calling to love. Let us therefore reflect on today's readings and discover together how love protects.

## 1. Protection in the Shelter of Most High (Psalm 91)

Psalm 91 has long been a source of comfort and strength for people facing uncertainty, fear, and confusion. It bears witness to God's faithful protection for those who seek refuge in Him. In the shelter of the Almighty, people discover security, peace, belonging, and rest. The psalmist employs rich and tender imagery to describe God's care: a secret place, a refuge, a fortress, and a mother bird covering her young with her wings. Each image reveals an important aspect of God's loving protection. A refuge is a place of safety and rest. A fortress is a place of defence and recovery, where the wounded can find healing and strength. God is with us even in our darkest moments. When every other light seems to fade, His presence continues to shine.

The psalm speaks of God's protection from many life-threatening dangers: "the snare of the fowler," "the deadly pestilence," "the terror of the night," "the arrow that flies by day," and even "the lion and the cobra." These images remind us that God's care embraces every dimension of life. He protects us from physical, emotional, spiritual, and social dangers. The psalm also speaks of the ministry of angels, through whom God watches over His people. Often God extends this protection through caring individuals and communities who embody His love and concern. One of the most remarkable themes in this psalm is the connection between God's protection and freedom from fear. The psalmist declares: "You will not fear the terror of the night." This echoes the words of 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear." The psalm culminates in a series of beautiful divine promises: "I will deliver; I will protect; I will answer when one calls

[1] A Christian safeguarding group named after Proverbs 31:8 ('Speak up for the voiceless and the rights of vulnerable people').

to me; I will rescue and honour with long life and show my salvation." These promises point beyond mere physical preservation. They invite us into God's saving life, into a relationship of trust, communion, and eternal hope.

As we reflect on Psalm 91, we see that those who take refuge in the Most High are given a safe home, protection in times of danger, freedom from fear, the help of God's messengers, and the assurance of salvation. As we observe Safeguarding Sunday today, this message challenges us to consider the Church's calling. The Church is also meant to be a dwelling place of God among His people. Therefore, everyone who enters the Church seeking refuge should find a safe home where fear has no place, where people are protected from every form of abuse and harm, where compassion and care reflect God's angelic ministry, and where all are nurtured in the journey toward salvation. In this way, the Church becomes a living expression of the shelter of the Most High.

**2. Love in Action not in words (James 2: 14-26; 1 John 3: 16-24)**

The readings from James and John remind us that genuine faith and authentic love are not merely emotions or good intentions. They are lived realities expressed through concrete actions that seek the well-being of others. James boldly declares that faith without works is dead. Likewise, love without action is empty. True love protects, cares, and responds to the needs of those around us. James challenges his readers with a probing question: *"If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"* (James 2:15-16). Similarly, John asks: *"How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?"* (1 John 3:17). Both questions expose a painful truth: words alone cannot protect, comfort, or nourish those in need. Love becomes real only when it moves from speech into action.

Love protects through generosity, compassion, and mutual care. It notices the vulnerable and takes responsibility for their well-being. Yet such love is not always easy. It often requires sacrifice. So how do we learn to love in this way? John points us to the supreme example of Christ: *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters"* (1 John 3:16). Christian love imitates Christ by placing the needs of others before self-interest. While we may not be called to die for another person, we are called to give of ourselves for their protection and flourishing. Love always costs something. It may cost us our time, our comfort, our plans, our resources, our status, or even our pride. The Good Samaritan sacrificed his time, disrupted his schedule, used his resources, and set aside his own concerns in order to care for a wounded stranger. Above all, Jesus left the glory of heaven, humbled himself, took the form of a servant, and ultimately gave his life on the cross to reveal the depth of God's love for humanity.

This challenges us to ask ourselves: *What are we willing to sacrifice to demonstrate genuine love for others?* Without stepping beyond our comfort zones and personal priorities, we cannot truly love our neighbours as Christ loved us. In this light, the safeguarding ministry of the Church is a profound expression of love in action. Safeguarding is not simply a policy or a procedure; it is the practical embodiment of Christian love. It seeks to protect the vulnerable, listen to those who are hurting, prevent abuse, and create a community where every person can flourish in safety and dignity.