St Brandon's **Judgement, love and safeguarding** 15 November 2026

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-end; Matthew 25:14-30

Our readings today are not exactly comforting! "… on the day of the Lord's wrath; in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth". Mmm. We don't often have a reading from Zephaniah, a short book towards the end of the OT. But it's a pity that when we do this is the only extract we get. In Chapter 2 we find these words: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath" (v.3). So, apparently, not all the inhabitants of the earth are destined for a terrible end. And the very last verse of the book in Chapter 3, addressed to Jerusalem, says, "The Lord, your God, is in your midst, … he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love" (v.17).

Ah! So, a rather different picture emerges, a picture we are, of course, much more comfortable with. But, at the same time, we should not lose that powerful image from the first chapter of God's judgement, His wrath and the fire of His passion.

Our gospel reading, the parable of the talents, is of course much more familiar to us, but again makes for some uncomfortable reading. God seems to be portrayed as a rather angry master who doesn't refute the accusation made by the third slave that he was a harsh man, reaping where he did not sow, and gathering where he had not scattered seed. And who takes the talent away from the third slave, giving it to the successful first slave, and having the now worthless third slave thrown into the outer darkness. Mmm.

But again, we need to balance that with other parts of scripture which speak, as did Zephaniah eventually, of God rejoicing over us with gladness, and renewing us in His love. At the same time, we also need to hear the message of the parable – that we are all given gifts, practical, pastoral, spiritual and so on, and that we need to learn how to use them. The question, "What have we done in the service of the Kingdom of God with the talents we have been given?" is one that always confronts us, and probably does and should make us feel uncomfortable.

But is it true that, if we fail like the third slave, God will condemn us eternally? Surely not. Will we be judged? We surely will. Will we be damned? Surely not.

Now, as I said at the beginning of the service, today is Safeguarding Sunday. This is something that has been going for a number of years, but this is the first time we have marked it in any way, although we have addressed safeguarding in sermons and services previously. The theme of Safeguarding Sunday this year is 'Love protects', and is taken from 1 Corinthians 13: 7 which reads "Love always protects" (NIV). I think I'd want to add, 'genuine' to that – genuine love, of the kind St Paul was describing in that glorious passage

about love, always protects. So yes, safeguarding involves policies, procedures, training and more. But at its heart, it's about people – precious, valued people made in the image of God. When we protect them, we love them. When we love them, we reflect the heart of God.

But the first people that our readings today address are the perpetrators of abuse, in any of its forms – physical, psychological, domestic, financial, abuse from neglect, sexual abuse, spiritual abuse and so on. To the perpetrators our readings say this first, know the wrath of God, know the judgement of God, know the fire of His passion. And know that, whether you are caught and punished in this life or not, God knows and will judge and will punish, so that justice will be done.

But, know also that there is a way through all of this involving repentance and forgiveness, such that God will not condemn eternally.

To victims-survivors we want to say that you are precious, valued people made in the image of God, so that you really matter, and what has happened to you or is happening to you really matters. We hope and pray that we as church here offer a safe space, and can offer protection and support if you need it from us.

And to us as Church here, we need to know that safeguarding is a defining mark of Christian love. It is one of the most practical, faithful ways we live out our calling. Love is a choice and an action. It is doing whatever is needed to keep one another safe.

In everyday terms, safeguarding means:

- Protecting children and adults from abuse, neglect, exploitation and mistreatment;
- Preventing harm to a person's health, wellbeing or development;
- Noticing early when something isn't right and offering support before a situation worsens;
- Responding appropriately when there are concerns, so people get the help and protection they need;
- Creating a culture of safety, so people can flourish in safe, respectful relationships and environments.

And all of that means that it isn't just my job as Parish Safeguarding Officer, or just the job of the Rector and PCC, or just the job of those who lead children's and youth work, but safeguarding is a matter for all of us. And that includes speaking up not just in relation to specific cases, but also if you think that something isn't right, or isn't as good as it could be, in relation to our policies and practices.

So, we hear this morning of God's wrath, of His judgement and the fire of His passion. But we hear also of His rejoicing over us with gladness, and renewing us in His love. And we

hear that genuine love always protects, so that when we protect others, we love them. And when we love them, we reflect the heart of God.

Amen. May it be so among us.