

SAFE.

What does it mean to feel, and be, safe?

It's holding the hand of someone you love. Or a parent's magic kiss on a grazed knee. It's a baby sound asleep in a loving embrace. That's safe.

It's when you're wrapped up warm and tight, indoors on a dark and cold night, somewhere you know, somewhere that's comfortable, where you can just 'be'. That's safe.

It's knowing you're not on your own because there's someone there at the end of the phone, to call or to text when you're feeling alone. That someone you can always rely on, that shoulder to cry on when things get tough. That's safe.

Safe can be the shield, the defence, the fortress, a lighthouse guiding you through the storm, or the harbour offering protection when the seas get rough.

Or safe can be that big red traffic sign that says stop, there's danger ahead.

And isn't that what the church is called to be? A refuge for the refugee, a sanctuary for the broken. A space for the hurting to find healing, a place for the last, the least, the lost, those on the margins and those in the centre, a place to find meaning. For God's eternal banner over me and you is love. And there is no fear in love for His perfect love casts out all fear and is safe.

We've not lived up to that expectation, we've fallen short, instead we've prioritised our own reputation, and if that's not cause for lamentation, I don't what is.

I don't mean to be the voice of condemnation; It's just time to prioritise the conversation. Giving space for those who need to, to share, to be believed, be renewed and find restoration.

If those things that were once kept out of sight, and covered up, are brought into the open. And we make space for the unspeakable things to be spoken. Their power can be broken.

Because a church that faces its shortcomings, and gives space to listen, reflects something of the kingdom of God. A church which truly loves is a church striving to be safe.

So it's time to put safeguarding on the church's agenda, to change the culture of yesterday, to pause and remember. Because safe is bold, it's the firm foundation beneath our feet, it means we can stand and take the leap of faith to have those conversations and be a church that's safe.