



Study notes - week 12

A community that protects - safeguarding

w/c 24 November 2019

"The experience of being listened to is so close to the experience of being loved as to be indistinguishable."
Sara Savage (Psychology and Religion Research Group, University of Cambridge)

Readings – 1 John 1:5-10 and Matthew 18:2-11

The words in our readings this week focus on individuals – especially the vulnerable such as young children. As we look further into the Bible's teaching in this area, it becomes clear though that there are more things we are called on to protect, and keep safe and, indeed, more than that, build up.

Protecting society (and individuals)

Writing earlier this month, Archbishop John Sentamu described the dehumanising nature of low pay¹. He concluded that: *"The Bible urges us to treat one another fairly: those who are on the breadline are to be given back their dignity and self-respect."* Do we just nod assent or should this be a call to action for churches across the country? What do this and passages such as Isaiah 3:14-15; Jeremiah 5:26-28 and Amos 5:21-24 say to us about the way we practice religion in 21st century Britain?

How much is society more than just a collection of individuals? How do we balance providing safety for those who come to us with wider activities to protect society – and hence the individuals within it?

A senior (and now retired) politician said earlier this year that there are those active in politics today in this country who *"...want to dismantle much of what we regard as the underpinning of civilised life in the modern world."* How should churches and individual Christians work to protect such things?

Various writers in the Bible make it clear that protecting the poor is a part of God's very character (see for example, Psalm 12:5 or Psalm 35:10), and consequently those who fail to do so evoke his anger (Isaiah 10:1-2 for example). Such protection should be a fundamental characteristic of rulers: as Jeremiah put it (22:16) – *"He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well."* How, in Britain today, can we encourage those in power to act in this way? What can we do directly ourselves? Think back to the words of Isaiah we read last week (Isaiah 1:13-17)

Protecting creation

The bible describes how we were placed in Eden to take care of it (Genesis 2). Genesis 1 clearly links the injunction to 'rule' over the earth with statements about our being made in the image of God. What does that imply for our approach to caring for the planet?

It is clear that humanity's impact on several biological and physical systems of the Earth is unsustainable. Where should the church place itself on the spectrum from the civil disobedience of Extinction Rebellion to commitments to have done 'something' by 2050 and why?

"Love ... always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Corinthians 13:6&7)

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/11/living-wage-movement-decent-days-work-pay>