



**A sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist at Wells
Cathedral, preached on Sunday 16 November 2025
by the Reverend Mary Lewis, Priest Vicar.**

The Second Sunday Before Advent; Safeguarding Sunday

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be now and always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I wonder how many of you were aware, if you came into the Cathedral through the North Door, that you were walking in under the carving of the martyrdom of St Edmund, King of Anglia whose feast day we celebrate this coming Thursday. The story of his martyrdom is carved in a series of three dramatic and moving scenes. The first scene shows King Edmund tied to a tree and pierced through by arrows, shot by invading Danes. The king then appears with crowned head bowed, humbly awaiting execution. And the final image is of a wolf, retrieving the severed head so it can be reunited with his body. Edmund was killed by an invading Danish army in 870 after refusing to hand over his kingdom or renounce his Christian faith. Because of this refusal, he was widely revered. A martyrdom might not seem to be a very promising start for Safeguarding Sunday but King Edmund's courage and faith, is a vivid demonstration of Jesus' call in the gospel for endurance in the face of persecution. And while we hope that no one will ever have to face such a situation or be harmed by another in any way at all, the reality of life tells another story.

In the difficult passage from St Luke's Gospel, we hear of Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and of his warnings about deception, wars, earthquakes and famines that will precede the end. This 'end' was linked in the minds of people at that time with the Last Day when Jesus would appear again, the time called the Second Coming; but that would not follow immediately. Before then, Jesus tells his followers that they will face persecution, arrest and betrayal. The passage ends with the reassurance that by enduring all difficulties they will gain their souls.

It is hard for us to know how to interpret Jesus' prophecies of the Last Times and of his Second Coming as it is now over 2,000 years since his First Coming and in all that time there has been no sign of a Second Coming in glory when all the earth will see him. On the other hand, we are living in a time when persecution of Christians has never been greater, conflicts have never been so numerous, and the earth itself is crying out in pain.

The Thessalonians, who we heard about in the first reading, had a different perspective. Paul had founded their community around the year 50 CE and they had continued to experience persecution and opposition to their new faith. Some of the community had come to believe that such suffering was an indication that the Day of the Lord, or even the end of the world, was soon to come and so had stopped working and rather given up on life. To reassure them, St Paul wrote to say that despite their experience of persecution, such an event as the Day of the Lord was for the future. Rather they were to have courage, return to work and continue to grow in faith.

Thankfully we are not experiencing persecution, but many Christians are. The number of countries where Christianity is no longer safe is of great concern. Safeguarding may not be quite in the same category as persecution or martyrdom, but it is still of much concern and there is no room for complacency. I am sure that all who are with us this morning, including from the school, will be glad to hear that much has been achieved as regards creating safer environments, celebrating the work of safeguarding volunteers, and building a culture of accountability and transparency. But a report featured in last week's *Church Times* by the Charity Commission, says that the Church of England must move faster in its efforts to overhaul safeguarding. More "robust interim measures" are needed to keep people safe. The report recognises that improving safeguarding is an ongoing journey, a journey that must take bolder steps, informed by the experience of victims and survivors. It is good to hear that the Redress Scheme for survivors of church-related abuse has been given final approval but there remains a tension in the scheme between giving proper recompense to victims and weeding out false or misguided applications. This draws attention to the complexity of safeguarding issues and must surely encourage us to do all we can to make the Cathedral, our schools and all places, safe and welcoming spaces.

As well as the danger of persecution and injustice between people, as we heard from the gospel, Jesus mentions that the earth itself, and even the heavens, are to experience great disturbances. In the light of the climate crisis, this is something that we all, especially young people, are extremely concerned about. Could the calamitous floods, earthquakes and hurricanes, be an indication that

something is terribly amiss in the relationship between humanity and the earth? Is the earth itself a safeguarding issue? At this very time COP30, the United Nations Climate Conference, is meeting in Brazil. Delegates from 190 countries are discussing the crisis and its devastating impacts, including the frequency of extreme weather which is already displacing people from their traditional homelands. Jesus' prophecies may not be so wrong. Sir David Attenborough wrote, "Climate change is our greatest threat in thousands of years. If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon". What courage and sacrifices will be needed to turn this crisis around?

The gospel passage from St Luke comes from Jesus' final teaching before his passion. It was his last chance to warn people of the difficult times ahead. At this point in the life of Jesus, we are far from the days in Galilee when he shared such uplifting teaching as the Sermon on the Mount or told the parable of love and forgiveness of the Prodigal Son. If Jesus calls us to find courage and endurance, he is now about to face the most shocking death of all.

Through the days of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, the disciples found it very hard to hold on to their courage. They locked themselves up in the Upper Room for fear of being arrested. Their hopes had been shattered, their expectations destroyed. Where were they to go, what would they do? Then the risen Christ appears among them and breathes peace and new life into them. Suddenly, they are filled with joy, and the terror of the last days falls away, and they will discover a courage that knows no bounds. Like the disciples, even amid difficulties, we can open wide our hearts to the Risen Christ and invite him to enter our lives and set us on the path that brings life and joy. For whatever disturbances there are on the earth, they are not eternal as is the love of God.

It was a tragedy that the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed but ultimately it is not buildings that matter, for the Church is built of living stones and that means you and me. We are called to become the building blocks of a temple that cannot be destroyed. We are called to be faithful and to testify to the love of Jesus with all the courage we can find whatever situations we meet in our lives. This is the means whereby hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us and is promised for all eternity. Amen.