

Theology and Safeguarding:

Trauma, justice, forgiveness, wholeness, experience and calling.

This paper was prepared by a survivor-led group, after a careful process of reflection and discussion. It was important to us that it fully represented a survivor perspective, as survivors' voices are often missing from theological debate. Also, some of us have been hurt by theological perspectives that deny, silence, or minimise our experience; some have experienced spiritual abuse that have made us doubt whether God is indeed safe, loving and just. For these reasons, we encourage anyone using this as a resource for conversations and study, to join with survivors as you do so. (We can help you to reach out to survivors and engage safely).

This is offered as a springboard for a continuing exploration of theology and safeguarding, and a contribution to the vital work the church is doing concerning safeguarding and trauma. It represents *a* survivor perspective, not *the* survivor perspective. It is *a* contribution towards a theology for safeguarding, not a comprehensive account. We will be offering further resources and opportunities to join the conversation. We hope you will join us.

Introduction

Often in the church, when we think about safeguarding, we might think about training days, process, paperwork, safeguarding officers. The word can create discomfort about being out of our depth and fear of not responding well. A whole host of emotions are loaded onto the word, and by the time these emotions combine with the sense that safeguarding is about process and getting things right, safeguarding becomes this thing that we do, a requirement, a duty. But what if there were a completely different way to look at it? What if safeguarding is not being reactive, but being the church? What if we first ask ourselves, "What does it mean for us to be human and to be church together?" "What kind of community, filled with what kind of people, is God calling us to be?" and "How does safeguarding fit with the ministry of the Gospel?"

The community of people who have curated this resource live out these questions daily. Our lives intersect in many ways as survivors, writers, advocates, priests, lay people, disciples, theologians. We imagine you will come to this resource carrying with you your own experiences, your own questions. It can be used as a whole, or simply as a series of individual resources to drop in and out of. We are not attempting to propose a comprehensive theology, rather to start a conversation. Our hope is that as you engage and intersect with our lives and words, that you will know a renewed vision for the church and for all of us who survive.

Safeguarding: A theological matter?

The whole story of Scripture offers us a vision for communities that prizes human dignity and enables flourishing, starting with the creation story in Genesis. At a time when empires and peoples believed that only a king was made in the image of God, a king with complete power while others were on earth merely to serve the gods, no more than slaves, the opening story of Scripture cast a radically different vision. All humankind is made in the image of God, male and female. In God's plan, there is equality, worth, dignity, and a profound challenge to the way power is exercised. However, humankind is incapable of living out this vision, and the story of Adam and Eve explores the ways in which relationships become broken and unhealthy, how human beings come to rule over one another, and the precious dignity and equality of creation ebbs away.

From then on, the story of Scripture entwines two themes: maintaining the vision that God had forged and living with the reality of human sin, with its lasting consequences. Sin destroys and violates the precious dignity and image of God in those who are victims of it, and those who commit it. God works relentlessly to restore this image within individuals and communities. This means reaching out to those who suffer and bringing deliverance; it means helping a community, Israel, work out how to organise their life together in ways that promote healthy relationships and flourishing; it means holding people to account when they fail, in particular leaders. And it means being radically honest about humanity.

There are four theological themes that run through Scripture powerfully and can help us begin to think theologically about safeguarding: **care for the vulnerable**, which is **everyone's responsibility**, **challenging unhealthy power** dynamics, and **unflinching honesty** about our nature.

Care for the vulnerable runs through the whole of Scripture. God repeatedly commands care towards the widow, the orphan and the stranger, people most likely to be abused because they had least power and were largely invisible. God's care and compassion is not reactive. It is proactive and conscious. It challenges the comfortable in their routine and calls out discrimination that marginalises and makes others powerless.

It is everyone's responsibility to care for others in a community. Scripture tells us it is not simply left to a community's leaders or designated officers. To care well the entire community must organise itself in ways that promote healthy relationships. The book of Judges explores the relationship between people and leaders, and how carelessness, abuses of power and unwillingness to speak out lead to the brutalisation and abuse of women and children. Judges locates responsibility in perpetrators but also in communities, in their choices of leaders, in the way they are organised, and in governance. Creating safe and healthy communities is a communal task that involves every person.

Challenging unhealthy power dynamics is at the heart of Scripture. The story of Exodus centres around God's challenge to Pharaoh's gross abuses of power; the people cry out to God, and God intervenes. But in their liberation, God calls Israel out of Egypt to form a different kind of community. Liberation from Pharaoh is not enough; the people need to be freed from Egypt's ways of thinking and organising themselves as a community. In receiving the Law, Israel is called to care for the vulnerable and not misuse power. There are laws to prevent the accumulation of

wealth and inherited privilege; laws to prevent a king from being too powerful and separate from the people; laws to protect the fair administration of justice; laws to limit the power of male heads of households in a deeply patriarchal society. Underneath all these is the call to love God and love our neighbour.

But humankind is peculiarly lured by power and the temptation to use others for their own ends. There are countless stories of power being misused by those who hold power in all its forms, and countless stories of prophets and people who stand up and challenge the misuse of power at every level. So, God redefines power in the climactic event of Scripture; the coming of Jesus Christ. In an act of complete redefinition of what power means, God demonstrates how to use power well, the power not of dominance or coercion, but the power of self-giving love and service. This redefinition of power is deeply uncomfortable, and the church has struggled to embody it from the earliest times. God in Christ takes his own power seriously, does not refuse to use it, or deny it, but instead, uses power differently, to restore human beings and offer healing, welcome, and, indeed, challenge.

Unflinching honesty about our nature flows through Scripture. It would have been easy for Scripture to be full of heroes and people who got it 'right'. Instead, we have a myriad of fragile broken communities that struggle to be who they are called to be. Communities that sometimes get it right, sometimes not, and sometimes fail catastrophically. Yet the limitations of the community of faith are never the end of the road: God patiently works with them with a never-ending grace. It is this divine presence that enables honesty: human beings do not have to pretend, because they are already known and loved. Much of Scripture is shaped by the complex trauma of being creatures in the world, and the Old Testament does not flinch from looking at this reality in the face: the ugliness of sin and abuses of power; the potential of every person and community to do the unthinkable; the deep impact of the sin of others, and how it mingles with our own brokenness and sin.

If Scripture teaches us one thing, it is that in the face of evil, communities need to be honest about what has happened, what the consequences are, and how their own trauma, sin or brokenness shapes their response – good, bad, or non-existent. We see this in Paul's public transformation from murderer of Christians to lover of Christ. How do we create this kind of honesty within our communities and within ourselves? This is the challenge we need to take up in the church, a challenge that safeguarding is part of: to be honest about who we are, to care for the vulnerable, to challenge unhealthy power dynamics, and to nurture responsible communities of belonging, dignity, and flourishing.

Questions:

- How does Scripture speak to you of safeguarding and why?
- Which key texts would you turn to when enabling others to explore a theology of safeguarding?

Safeguarding: Trauma

Not only is Scripture shaped by trauma, understanding trauma is essential to comprehend the impact of abuse. So, we cannot speak of theology and safeguarding without thinking about trauma and allowing trauma theory to shape our thinking and responses. Trauma (from the Greek word for 'wound') arises when we experience an overwhelming force that threatens our continued existence. Trauma expert Judith Herman describes how "traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning." (1993, p. 33) The terror and distress from abuse lead to rupture, shattering, fragmentation, and loss. The psychological and spiritual wounds from trauma shatter individual lives and communities. Relationships are ruptured, identities are fragmented, the sense of self is lost, and victims are left feeling broken and overwhelmed, described by Susan Shooter as 'the annihilated soul' (Shooter, 2012).

Trauma is disturbing. It is a deep and lasting wound that tears its way through life. No one asks to be abused. No one seeks as a child to be harmed by an adult. No one enters a community of faith to be abused by those they consider worthy of their trust. Trauma is inflicted. Trauma sticks and shapes the brains of survivors, impacting their immune system, making relationships fragile, making life hard to survive. Trauma does not grow old; it is as fresh today as the day it was first inflicted.

Trauma wounds run deep and are embodied in our neurological and nervous systems. The Post Traumatic Stress specialist Dr Bessel Van Der Kolk wrote, "We now know that trauma compromises the brain area that communicates the physical, embodied feeling of being alive. These changes explain why traumatised individuals become hypervigilant to threat at the expense of spontaneously engaging in their day-to-day lives (2014, p. 3). The wounds of trauma are carried not just in our emotions, but in our very nervous system. Traumatized reactions trigger our body into fight, flight, freeze or appease responses. These are the automatic responses of a dysregulated system, adapted to survival. Trauma therapist Debs Dana explains 'trauma compromises our ability to engage with others by replacing patterns of connection with patterns of protection' (2018, p. 3). Understanding trauma is essential to engaging with survivors and supporting recovery.

We might see the arc of God's story and our story as one of trauma and recovery, rupture and repair, dysregulation, and redemption. Judith Herman describes trauma recovery as unfolding through three stages: 'The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life' (1993). Recovery from trauma can be a lifelong process, but it can also lead to growth, as it forces us to re-examine our core beliefs, leading us to a new understanding of ourselves, changed relationships with others, and a new philosophy of life (Calhoun and Tedeschi, 1998).

The good news of trauma recovery mirrors the transformative Good News of our gospel, the redemption born of suffering. Through the lens of trauma, we can meet survivors in the messiness of the aftermath of abuse, with compassion and understanding, rather than judgement and fear. And perhaps if we find ourselves dis-regulated and disturbed by these encounters, the lens of trauma helps us to understand those experiences in our own story that might have been triggered. The journey of recovery is the journey of caring and nurture at the

heart of our theological narrative, the God who loves us and calls us to love. But is love enough?

Questions:

- Where do you see the stories of trauma, rupture, repair, and growth in Scripture?
- How could we set about accompanying survivors on the journey of recovery?

Theology and trauma in safeguarding: three themes

The theological themes outlined earlier combined with questions around trauma in three very specific areas that are worth exploring to a greater degree, as they are a focus of pain and difficulty in survivor stories. Of course, there are many more themes that could be explored in much greater detail, but these three are the ones that seem most salient.

Safeguarding: God's Justice

“Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.” (Martin Luther King).

Scripture reveals God's justice to be far broader and more healing than a set of commandments or an adversarial judicial system. Yes, God judges between right and wrong, God acts with equity, making “...his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous...” (Matthew 5.45b), and holds all equally to account before his holiness. But the biblical understanding of justice, is much broader. A judicial system focused on specific cases can never really be just unless it inscribes itself within a much broader set of community practices and responses that look at overall justice and promote healthy communities. God's justice in Scripture almost always comes allied with God's faithfulness, mercy and 'steadfast love'. *'Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you'*. (Ps 89.14). In this act of creative mergence, God's justice becomes redemptive; not simply 'restorative' in getting things back to where they were, even if that is possible, but redemptive in moving forward into a time of grace and healing.

There is a danger that our judicial system focusses on 'retributive', justice, the punishment of offenders with the appropriate redress for victims; rehabilitation can be seen as being 'soft' on offenders and failing to protect the public. Restorative justice only happens at the end of formal procedures, if at all. And for justice to be restorative, it needs to involve the wider community, and a much bigger vision for wholeness. This can also be said of our internal church safeguarding and disciplinary processes. How can we bring the wider Scriptural understanding of justice into our response to abuse?

To focus on justice as primarily retributive, or even 'distributive' - that all should have equal rights under the law, and an equal share in life's opportunities and benefits, is not enough in itself. What survivors of church-based abuse often need is not primarily retributive or distributive; though accountability, redress and equity are all important in their place.

Survivors mostly want to be heard, understood, supported, believed, and helped to heal. To enter the possibilities of God's redemptive justice that brings restoration.

Questions:

- Has the Church of England adopted a retributive or distributive understanding of justice at the cost of a redemptive and restorative understanding?
- How can the Church of England act in ways that are redemptive and restorative?
- What might redemptive justice mean for a survivor who looks to the Church of England to be heard, understood, supported, and believed?

Safeguarding: Problem with Forgiveness

Often the church does not seem very concerned with justice, and mistakenly promotes a view of forgiveness that cheapens or eradicates justice. "If you could just forgive him, all these bad feelings would just go away." This is the response that many survivors have reported receiving when they disclose abuse to clergy and other Christians. Even more devastating is: 'If you don't forgive, God won't forgive you'.

Forgiveness is a central Christian doctrine with a range of meanings including liberate, release, let go, lift away, carry. In Scripture a primary emphasis is on the action of God who heals, lifts burdens, cancels a debt and restores a relationship. Healing from trauma (what Stephen Cherry calls 'shattering harm',) can take decades, particularly where there has been an absence of redemptive restorative justice. Trivialising forgiveness, implying it is something that is easy and you 'just do it', can itself be abusive because it re-traumatises a vulnerable and hurting person. Trivialising forgiveness fails to understand the nature of trauma: the impact of past abuse keeps coming back in multiple ways; even as survivors engage with help and gain healing, they will often be surprised at renewed feelings and hurt prompted by changes in life and circumstances. Forgiveness therefore is not a one-off, an event. It is something that is continual because one cannot forgive what has not affected you in a certain way yet.

Like other experiences of loss, trauma recovery often goes through stages; there is denial, depression, and righteous anger, especially when the survivor is denied justice. The denial of justice is a frequent experience of those who have experienced church abuse when formal processes are worked through and the case is dropped, leaving survivors feeling they have not experienced justice. A survivor denied justice and left with boiling righteous anger is not likely to be able to forgive. Not least because no one has apologised to them or asked for their forgiveness. The survivor needs an apology, particularly from the perpetrator of the abuse, and where that has not happened, they need a personal apology from a bishop familiar with the case. An apology should include penitence for the church system that the survivor has experienced as abusive and rejecting.

Despite not receiving a heart-felt apology, some survivors are eventually able to 'let go' of the harm done to them. However, this needs compassionate help and may take many years of therapy just to make a start on this painful journey. Forgiveness should never be confused with reconciliation. These are very different elements of a survivor's journey and ones that only they

can decide to enter into over time with support. Nor should forgiveness be used as an impediment to justice; justice is the way in which entire communities regulate themselves and ensure safety. To hold perpetrators to account is to act on behalf of the community as a whole; they can be forgiven by a victim, but communities still need to be shaped as safe and healthy places, and this cannot happen without justice.

Questions

- What might be the effect on a survivor of abuse to hear a simplistic 'just forgive' sermon?
- When a survivor is denied an apology and they are faced with denial, how do they start on the journey of forgiveness?
- What does a meaningful apology look like?

Safeguarding: Wholeness

So, we try to navigate difficult issue like forgiveness, as we roll down the river of justice. Where will this journey take us? Remembering trauma as violence and disruption, where do we find peace and wholeness?

As the New Testament says: "Christ is our peace... and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us." (Eph. 2.14). Peace is not just the absence of conflict, but the 'shalom' of wholeness and well-being, the end of suffering, as well as justice; Jesus' words of peace to replace trouble and fear; accountability (repayment) of wrongs (debts) paving the way for restoration of right relationships with each other and with God¹. How can our church congregations be enablers of 'shalom'? After abuse, how can well-being and flourishing, for individuals and for whole congregations, be nurtured?

The quest for 'shalom', 'flourishing', 'life in its fullness' must be the foundation for restoration after abuse. It may never be safe for a survivor to be reconciled with their abuser. The primary task is to ensure well-being through creating physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial safety, and offering support to victims and survivors for their physical and mental health. Can our churches be safe spaces for survivors and others damaged by abuse, places without fear? Christian faith is rooted in loving relationships with our Creator. Can the church help survivors and families to restore relationships when their trust has been betrayed? Even if they are (understandably) angry or distant, how does the church reach out with love and compassion?

Abuse does not only shatter the life of the person being abused. Shortcomings in safeguarding children and in the care of survivors can also shatter a congregation. 'Church communities are often crippled for years, at times even destroyed' observes Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger (2015). She suggests resources for conflict resolution and restorative strategies to rebuild communities in which traumatized people can heal. To consider the trauma of abuse well, we need to help the radiating circle of trauma that abusers leave in their trail: direct victims first, but also families, friends, churches, and communities, who suffer from secondary trauma.

¹For example, Aaron's blessing (Num.6. 24-26); Rev 21.3-4; John 14.27; 2 Cor 13.11; Col 1.19-20

It is the recovery from shattered lives that enables individuals and families to flourish again: life in all its fullness. We know that trauma often needs long-term expert therapy. Peer support is also hugely important for many survivors on their healing path. How can the church resource and support their journeys?

- What might we see in a flourishing congregation?
- What is the church's role in supporting healing and enabling 'shalom'?
- How might we be the 'anam cara' (soul friend²) for a survivor, or support them to find one?

Safeguarding: Experience - Sally's story (begins with a safeguarding disclosure)

We are offering a story based on experiences familiar to members of the group, to reflect on how these themes and insights might transform our responses to survivors, and abusive situations, in our roles as officers and ministers of the church. When we engage theologically with safeguarding, how does that shape our response?

Sally was raped by a stranger when she was 6 years old. Her stepfather, step-grandfather, uncle, and older brother all sexually assaulted her as a child – the older brother on a daily basis once she was 12 so she never felt safe at home. Her mother was a narcissist and manipulated Sally, repeatedly putting her down, telling her that she had never come to anything and that she was 'useless'.

Sally had her first serious bout of depression and suicidal thinking at 14. She became a Christian at 16 and joined the local church youth group which she found accepting and friendly. Sally felt she had forgiven her abusers, although this always worried her because she found it upsetting if any of the memories came into her head. She met Jez at university, and she told him about the abuse before they were married. Jez came from a Christian home and he supported Sally through anxiety and depression telling her God loved her. Both Sally and Jez were teachers, Jez received rapid promotion to a headship by the time the first of their three boys were born.

Sally struggled with the babies because someone told her that all survivors become abusers. Had she looked at their naked bodies for too long? Should she even be wiping them there? Would the boys survive with such a rubbish mother? Sally had bouts of severe anxiety and depression when the boys were little and ended up taking anti-depressants, but she had counselling and gradually life became more manageable. So, she stopped therapy because she found that by not talking about the abuse, she was able to manage. She believed that as a follower of Jesus, she was obeying God's will for her life.

The whole family enjoyed their local church, although Sally found people touching her in The Peace excruciating. She also hated having to queue in the communion service, disliking having someone behind her. Despite these fears, Sally and Jez became youth leaders and hosted a house group.

²John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara, A Book of Celtic Wisdom*, Harper Perennial, 1998.

- ***Pause and Reflect.***
- How are you responding to Sally's story so far?
- How does trauma theory illuminate this story so far?

The vicar of their local church, Steve, announced that the church was going to integrate someone (Eric) on the sexual offenders register into the congregation, Sally thought she was fine about that. Eric was friendly and courteous. He was keen to join in the Gardening Club at the church that tended the churchyard, managed the church allotment, and members took turns to invite others to have tea in their garden. Sally, Jez, and the boys became friendly with Eric at these events, and all seemed well.

But then Eric wanted to join Sally and Jez's house group. Sally was not sure about that because Eric had been found guilty of abusing young boys he taught. Sally's boys were now 12,14 and 15, exactly the age of those Eric had abused, and she was uncomfortable about having Eric in their home on a weekly basis. There were several other house groups and Sally asked the vicar if Eric could go to one of those.

However, Sally's hesitation caused an outcry in the church. She felt she had to disclose that she was a survivor of abuse and which she found painful and upsetting. Four other women also disclosed that they were survivors. These women sided with Sally and said that Eric should go to a different house group. Steve, the vicar, had several discussions with Sally and Jez and he said that Sally must forgive Eric and let him come to their house group. By now Sally was tearful, overwhelmed with anxiety, and unable to go to work. She felt angry, and this spilled out at home, so she felt guilt and shame that she was being a bad wife, mother and Christian.

Pause and Reflect.

- What do you want to say to Steve?
- What do you think Steve's underlying theology is?
- How would trauma theory help Steve respond better?

Sally could not make sense of Steve saying she had to forgive Eric. Surely the people who needed to forgive him were the boys he had abused. Eric complained that the schoolboys who, as men, had gone to the police about him, were 'just out to get money' and many in the congregation agreed with Eric on this point. Sally doubted that was true and thought that they probably wanted justice. She wished she had been able to get justice from her abusers but by now all of them were dead. The church was now split into two warring factions. Eric wrote to the bishop and received a reply. Eric said the bishop had told him how sorry he was that Eric had been treated so badly by the congregation.

Another survivor of abuse within the church was so angry at this that she demanded to see the bishop, who told her he most certainly had not said that. The bishop was friendly and kind to

the survivor and she left feeling sure that the bishop had not sided with Eric against the survivors as Eric had claimed.

- ***Pause and Reflect.***
- What are you noticing about relationships in this church community?
- How do the four Biblical themes apply in this situation?

Sally's world shattered when the Steve gave a sermon on forgiveness, quoting Matthew 18 saying that if people did not forgive, God would not forgive them. He came to see Sally and pointed out that if Sally had forgiven her childhood abusers properly, she would not be in the state she was now. By this point Eric had become secretary of the Gardening Club and Sally had to contact him to be on gardening rotas. Jez complained that Eric should not have a leadership role like that, but Steve said it was good to give Eric responsibility to show they all welcomed him.

Within a few weeks Sally was unable to leave the house. She could not sleep because of nightmares; she could not bear to eat with the family because out of the blue she could not cope with hearing sounds of eating. She could not bear anyone behind her so it felt impossible to sit through a church service and she felt she could never face The Peace. Her absence from church prompted the vicar and his faction to say that proved that Sally did not have a good relationship with God.

Pause and Reflect.

- What is your understanding of forgiveness and how would you communicate it?
- What would you want to say to Sally?

Sally felt betrayed and rejected by the church. She still could not get herself to work, and she had to sleep in the spare room because she could not feel safe with Jez in her bed. She had repeated intrusive 'flashbacks' of her early life - things she hadn't remembered. These were disturbing and after a few months she realised that she had memories of much earlier abuse, when she was just a little girl in her cot. She thought that the abuser was her stepfather. These memories became overwhelming, and Sally became suicidal. A helpful GP suggested medication and some therapy at the local Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, but there was a long waiting list, so she had some counselling at the GP surgery. She was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Jez had to give up running the youth group, and the house group. Four other women survivors in the church were able to help Jez with household tasks and with looking after Sally and the boys. They discussed how much they felt the church had let them down and suggested that they invite a consultant in safeguarding to come to the church. The vicar, Steve, eventually agreed to this so time set aside to analyse what had gone on and try to find a way forward.

The consultant covered issues such as the effects of trauma on people, the role that Eric could have in the church, how to support survivors of abuse, the theology of forgiveness etc. Discussions were started about how people felt they could stop fighting each other. Eric was asked not to come to the meetings, but his supporters came, and they dominated all the conversations and activities that were planned. It was clear to the safeguarding consultant that Steve was being manipulated by Eric, so were various members of the PCC. None of the survivors in the church felt they could come to the meetings, but they met individually with the consultant. All four of these women were considering leaving the church. So were Sally and Jez.

It was observed by the consultant that no-one was providing support to Sally and Jez except other survivors. They were all supporting each other but had no power in the situation to make changes or suggestions. Those involved had little understanding of the lifelong effects of abuse and the struggle to manage PTSD. The last word at the meetings went to one of Eric's supporters who said loudly as people left, "If only everyone would forgive Eric, then none of this would have happened."

Pause and Reflect.

- Return to the previous resource section on justice. What would redemptive restorative justice look like in this community?

Safeguarding Reflection: Recalling our calling

Called to search out the poor and weak, the oppressed and powerless, that the love of God may be made visible. Called to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor. Called to be mindful of the Good Shepherd, to have a special care for the poor, the outcast and those who are in need. These calls from the ordinals³ of deacon's, priests, and bishops are a vital part of what forms the distinctive nature of the Church of England. Yet they stand stark and alone when set against the clericalism and tribalism identified by those (such as IICSA) entrusted to investigate our common failures as a church. This difference between the call of a Church and its people, and the lived reality of many survivors contains profound disruption. A disruption that is profoundly discomforting and in which the trauma of abuse runs through our shared experience and shapes our story as a people to our shame.

Trauma survivors are often blamed or stigmatised for their responses to abuse. Yet as Van der Kolk asserts, 'We now know that their behaviours are not the result of moral failings or signs of lack of willpower or bad character - they are caused by actual changes in the brain' (2014, p. 3). Survivors and victims are not moral failures. They are not of poor character. They do not lack will-power. Their very selves have been compromised by the trauma inflicted upon them by their abusers, scarring their brain and bodies with the wounds of abuse. If we say a Survivor has failed, lacks character, needs more self-control, if we deny their voice, we abuse them again imprisoning them further in the despair of trauma and deny the innate dignity given them by

³Services of ordination for Church of England

the One whose image they bear. The trauma we inflict through ignorance or arrogance has no 'sell-by-date'.

Yet none of this should surprise the person of faith. As Christian's the story of our common heritage is a story that begins in a garden. Birthed in the hope of creation, humankind is formed in the image of the One who gave them form and breath. Here in the beginning our triune God declares in love the relationship between humankind to be safe and life-giving. A life of mutual self-giving declared by the God of mutual indwelling. Yet here in the narratives of the beginning slithers the first groomer and asks, "Did God say.....?" Doubt in the intention of divine love is sown into the history of humankind.

Did God really say seek out the oppressed and powerless? Did God really say resist evil, support the weak? Did God really say be mindful of the Good Shepherd....? Did God really say..... And in that sowing of doubt we take what is not ours to satisfy that which is not Gods. Power for position. Status for influence. The first groomer grooms us to stand in our shame and deny its existence. To silence the oppressed. To deny the powerless. What have we forgotten as the people of God? How do we begin to remember?

The disciple Peter, who abandoned Jesus, knew shame. The trauma of watching his beloved die, his body brutally abused and disfigured on a Roman cross. This trauma was denied in the shame by Peter's denial "I do not know him." Three times Peter denied. Three times Peter refused to be identified with the vulnerable Jesus to defend his own vulnerability. How many times must we deny the voice of the survivor to defend ourselves from the vulnerability of shame?

Yet hope did not die on a Roman cross. Hope incarnate ended the reign of sin and shame. Hope alive ended the endlessness of death. And in encountering the resurrected Jesus, in willingly surrendering to encounter the shame of his shame, Peter would know hope reborn. A hope that would give birth and life to the people we are today, the church. Are we a people who need to encounter the shame of our shame to know hope reborn for the life of our church?

Many years later Peter, the rock upon whom Jesus built his church, would write as an elder, "I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in which charge....as God would do it....be examples...And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away." (1 Peter 5.1-4 NRSVA) When we as leaders and elders are defended from shame and protected from trauma. When we secretly hope that our silence will silence the voices of survivors who must bear the shame and trauma we fear. What will we as leaders and elders offer our chief shepherd when he appears?

Perhaps it is time we surrender to our shame? Perhaps it is time we encounter the resurrected Jesus in willing surrender? Perhaps it is time we dared to inhabit and hear the trauma of others? The choice is before us, what will we choose; shame filled death or resurrection hope?

Actions:

- Take a moments silence to remember those whose lives have been impacted by abuse from within the Church of England.

- From what you have read and reflected on, write down three ways in which we as the Church of England can step out of the shame of failure and into resurrection hope?

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