



Monthly Reflection, April 2015

Knock knock. Who's there?

We can probably all identify a memory of a sinking feeling when there was an unexpected knock at the door at a time we really didn't want to answer it. Perhaps we were starting to unwind; or dinner was on...Privacy, rest and routine – all interrupted by a single sound.

But for some families, more than convenience is threatened by that knock.

Imagine what it must be like to open the door of your home to a bailiff. Now picture what it might be like to witness the conversation between them and your parent or carer when you are fifteen... or ten... or seven...

Safety, security and home itself – all threatened in a single, potentially hostile moment.

Jesus had a lot to say to people who were willing to make safe places unsafe in order to collect a fee or increase their power over the vulnerable. In Matthew 21, Jesus finds God's own house has been made unsafe – becoming 'a den of robbers' instead of a place of shelter for the very people God wanted to prioritise protecting; orphans, widows and strangers. No wonder Jesus turned over the tables in rage. The Temple was supposed to be a place of refuge where the poor could come for help and yet it was full of profiteers with false scales and crooked measures.

The Bible is packed with similar references to God being a safe place for those who are struggling – and equally full of anger at those willing to make the vulnerable unsafe to collect a fee.

In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of families with council tax debt; in 2013-2014 there were 1.3 million referrals to bailiffs. Children affected report fear, sleeplessness and stressful nights; and yet the payments, arrears and repayments are all completely out of their hands.

Councils have a duty of care to the vulnerable and yet they are amongst the most uncompromising organisations when it comes to reclaiming debt, with many families receiving a full payment demand just 14 days after the first missed payment, quickly followed by threats of court summons and bailiff visits.

The Children's Society is calling on all councils to stop sending bailiffs to houses where children and teenagers live. Every child and teenager should be able to feel safe when their front door closes behind them; there are some knocks that they should simply never hear. We need to make it as clear as Jesus would; a vulnerable child's sense of safety at home – and their mental well-being – is worth much more than the value of a swiftly reclaimed council tax bill.

Take action- ask your council to stop sending bailiffs to homes with children at childrenssociety.org.uk/counciltax