

Vicar's Sermon

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Title : Compartmentalising your life.
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Subject : How we include or exclude others who may be different to us.

I wonder to what extent you compartmentalise your life?

Our lives can so often become like our kitchen cabinets: one drawer for cutlery: one for glasses: one for dinner plates: one for pots and pans and so on. It makes life easier in that you know where to find things and it also appeals to our basic human psychology in that most people prefer some kind of order to chaos: even I do, believe it or not!

Unfortunately this tendency extends way beyond the confines of our kitchens, bedrooms or studies and it affects the way we view the world, ourselves and other people. If you go into most great cities you will find the Jewish quarter, the Arab quarter, the Asian quarter, China town and so on. Even in a village you find mental and actual segregation going on. I was reminded of this when we recently re-visited Wincanton in Somerset which was our first home and we had a little cottage at the bottom end of the village. There was a ladies circle that met each week in each other's homes and these were the wives of professional men. Christine was told that normally she would have qualified for this but our home was simply at the wrong end of town! Needless-to-say she regarded this as a narrow escape and lost very little sleep over it!

But it's real and it still goes on: I recently went into an old people's home and was told that a certain lady couldn't receive Holy Communion because she was a Roman Catholic. If that's how we view Catholics then how do we view Muslims, Atheists, Gays, Lesbians, the man whom I saw recently walking out of Tesco dressed as a woman (I'm afraid that the size of his biceps gave him away!) adulterers, those who have an affinity for viewing pornography, New Age worshippers etc..

You see, how you view and categorise other people can so easily affect how you view and categorise yourself. If you're hard on others then you can so easily become either bigoted or over hard on yourself. For I'm afraid that even the best of us have unacceptable sides even the most committed Christians who lead good lives and who live in the best parts of town.

So, what's all this got to do with the good news of Easter? A great deal because Jesus Himself was crucified and raised from the dead outside the city walls. He was most definitely on the exclusion list for not only had He consorted with the lowest dregs of society, some of whom were now His followers, but He was tried and executed as a common criminal. He was beyond the pail in every respect: unclean, untouchable and filthy and even a disgusting dog on the street would have commanded more respect. Occasionally I see a dead badger on the side of the road and over the days and weeks it slowly disintegrates until there is nothing left but a filthy rotting carcass: that was Jesus.

In a city full of confinements and segregation Jesus could not possibly have been executed within the city boundary because that would have contaminated the whole place and have offended the religious principles of its most worthy citizens! Even His dead carcass had to be placed in a borrowed tomb near the place of execution: again outside the city walls.

But, He rose from the dead outside the city wall.

God does not compartmentalise His love for His children and Jesus died and rose again for the whole of human kind even and especially those who are beyond human redemption and that includes each and every one of us.

The truth is that because of our sin we're all outsiders but in being crucified and dying as an outsider beyond the city walls He has secured our inclusion within the Kingdom of God. You will

not find any segregation or quarters in heaven because God's heart of love is not divided in relation to His children whoever they are and whatever they happen to be.

The Good News of Easter Day is that God's all inclusive love sets the whole of human kind free.

And what God has declared clean it is not for you and I to pronounce unclean. So, the next time you want to exclude someone from your circle, condemn them, judge them, and put them beyond the boundaries of your well ordered life: just remember and give thanks that God didn't do that to you and love others whoever they may be: you might even try loving yourself.

The Garden Tomb in Jerusalem is a beautiful place about half a mile from Golgotha and it's got ever such a funny notice on the door: it reads "The Garden Tomb will be closed on the following days: Monday afternoon: Wednesdays and Fridays." Thank goodness that notice wasn't there when the disciples ran to it on that first Easter Day! The Garden Tomb may be locked but thank God the tomb itself is empty, Jesus is risen, and God's heart is full of love for all His children.

Amen.

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