

Vicar's Sermon

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Title : Blank Canvas
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Subject : Letting God guide your "brush of life".

There's something very exciting but deeply challenging about a blank canvas: a clean sheet of paper.

This represents for us as a church a new year: a new beginning. It represents for you personally the opportunities and challenges of another year in your life. In fact, for a Christian, each day is a blank canvas: an opportunity for you and God to produce something together.

What will that be? For us as a church and for you as individuals?

I wonder how many people have received an oil painting set for Christmas and I wonder how many of them will ever get to the stage of undoing the box, taking out the brushes, setting up the canvas and making a start? If the Bible is the most purchased and yet least read of all books then oil painting sets, water-colour sets and drawing sets must be among the most acquired and yet least used items. I have to say that it's a lovely thing to have: the brushes are clean, the canvas is virginal white and the tubes of colour look so lovely in their box: like unused toothpaste tubes. But they weren't made or bought for show: they were meant to be used by you.

Life is exciting because of all its possibilities but it's also deeply daunting because you know that once you've made a mark on that blank sheet of paper it will never be the same again. One of the things that makes us hesitate is that we're so aware of all the mistakes we made yesterday but God tells us to put the past behind us and to reach out for that which is ahead. "Cease to dwell on days gone by and to brood over past history" said God to Isaiah in much the same way as He spoke to St Paul who wrote "Leaving the past behind I strain for the future and the finishing line." If you dwell on the mistakes and failures of yesterday's attempts then you will never complete or even start today's picture. And then you'll miss all the beauty, the enjoyment and the achievements that today and tomorrow can bring.

I wonder how many of you have convinced yourselves that you just can't draw? Well, if that's you, then listen to what Father God is saying to you: "Behold, right now, I am doing a new thing: can you not see it?" The wonderful truth is that it's not you alone who is doing the drawing but the Master Himself. Yes, you're holding the brush but it's God who's guiding your hand. And there's no better artist than God: after all, He created beauty itself. It is Father God who is doing a new thing in and through you and so you don't have to be good at it but be willing to pick up the brush, dip it into the colour and make a start. And what you produce will truly be a Masterpiece because the Master has helped create it. Do you want your life to be part of that wonderful picture? Your church and the life of freedom and fellowship that we can enjoy here? It can be and it will be if you let it happen.

Can't you feel it? Can't you see it? Said God. Open your hearts and open your spirits and you will experience a freedom and a joy that you haven't known before. And it's not something that we have to wait endlessly for because it's happening right here and right now. "This year is the year of the Lord's favour!" Father God is on the move and He's coming to a town, to a village, near you!

Yes, it's daunting and it will mean taking risks but God says that He will make a way through even the most barren and inhospitable land: He will provide water in even the driest and empty of places. So, why be frightened when even your mistakes can be transformed into reasons for praising God. The famous 20th Century artist, Francis Bacon, said that every painting was a discovery because you never knew where the paint was going to go and how each mark could be interpreted. The best art is often created not by intention but by mistake and that is precisely how it is with God. Try it and discover it in your own life.

And, one of the biggest rules of painting, don't fiddle and don't get fiddly. Most people are tempted to hold a brush like a pen but that's wrong: hold it at least half way down so that the whole arm is involved in the movement. I can hear you saying "Yes, but then we couldn't control it!" Precisely! Let God do the controlling and let go of your obsession with keeping everything and everyone under your control. The secret is not to get fiddly but see the bigger picture even before it appears on the canvas. In artistic terms it's called "previsualisation" and in spiritual terms it's called "having a vision" of all that God can do and will do in the day and in the year that lies ahead if only we can dare to try and focus our minds, our wills, our emotions on Him.

There was a famous artist who once said "Drawing is like taking a line for a walk". Well, in the year that lies ahead let's allow God to walk with us into the future that He has planned for us. Isaiah said "God has created you for Himself in order to proclaim His praises" or in the words of the Artist, Alan Crawshaw, at the end of each of his teaching videos on Oil Painting "Why not give it a go? Enjoy it! It's easier than you think!".

Amen.

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