

Vicar's Sermon

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Title : Dark Corners.
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Subject : Cleaning out the dark, dusty corners of your life.

What's God's favourite shape? Answer: a circle.

And why is a circle God's favourite shape? Answer: because there are no corners. Corners make for hard edges and they also are places where dust accumulates and where sin can so easily build up.

I was watching the Antiques Roadshow the other day and there was this beautiful golden Russian Icon with a painting of Mary and the baby Jesus in the centre. Icons, of course, were not just for decoration in people's homes but were objects of veneration and what I didn't realise is that they were often placed in the corners of rooms because it was there, in these dark spaces, that the devil was thought to dwell. Now, of course, we know that the devil is everywhere and he can even disguise himself as an angel of light but it did get me thinking about the corners of rooms because when I'm hoovering, for example, it's the one place I can't be bothered to get into. Whichever way you turn the Hoover it never gets right into the corner and I often can't be bothered to get the nozzle out and attach it! So the corners are left to accumulate more and more dust.

Couldn't that be equally true of our lives? How many of us turn a blind eye to issues in our lives that we should be confronting and allowing Jesus to put right? The room itself looks fine: it's clean and tidy and there's even a smell of lavender polish but what's going on in those areas that we choose not to look at or even acknowledge?

And what's true of us as individuals is also true of us as a Church. Take, for example, the issue of unity here at St. Mary's because on one level we are a united church but you wouldn't have to dig very deep to discover divisions. We shouldn't have two or three services on a Sunday but only one and the rest of the time we should be engaged in fellowship with each other or visiting people and supporting those who are ill or in need. But at present we can't do that because we've erected barriers based on our own preferences. But this is clearly wrong in the sight of God who wants unity in His Church but instead we're allowing the dark corners of personal prejudice and preference to dominate our thinking and our actions.

And I don't expect any thanks for saying this because the devil doesn't like to be disturbed in his murky hiding places. Someone said to me recently "you're causing dis-unity in the church!" but I'm not. What God is doing is highlighting the disunity that's already there and which in most churches is never spoken of because the leader doesn't want to invite a problem.

But if we look at the ministry of Jesus we see that right from the beginning He was addressing the issues and shining light into dark places. The one thing that God is not prepared to do is to leave us as we are because He wants to change us through His Spirit working within us. So if any of us come to church expecting to be left alone and unchallenged then we need to think again because that same Jesus who began His ministry by casting out devils and evil spirits is still intent on doing that today. Jesus wants no dark corners to exist either in our own lives or in the life of His Church.

Just a few quotes from today's reading: "Jesus healed many who suffered from various diseases and drove out many devils. He would not let the devils speak because they knew who He was." "Jesus went throughout Galilee: preaching in the synagogues and casting out devils." And in the passage just prior to this one a man with an unclean spirit cried out "What do You want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are: the Holy One of God!" Yes, Jesus has come to destroy the devil's works and to rid us of the dust and dirt that has clung to us and accumulated over the years and His mission is the same as it was 2,000 years ago.

Just a quick word about marriage because as I've already said it's National Marriage Week. For anyone whose considering getting married and I know that some of you are it's worth asking

yourselves what issues in your lives need to be dealt with before taking this incredibly important decision. The devil is not a creative being in that he doesn't invent new problems but what he does do is to use the issues that are already there in our lives and we've all got issues. So, don't let your love for each other blind you to the need to have a close look at yourselves because so many marriages would have been saved if people had done this sooner.

It takes effort, courage and faith to confront issues in our lives but let us never forget that He who is within us is far greater than he who is in the world and that, with God's help, there is no hidden corner that can't be cleaned out and no situation that cannot be remedied. Corners are places where two surfaces come together and therefore it is inevitable that as we grow in faith and determination to follow the Lord's leading conflict will arise but need to remember that all things are in God's hands, that He who is for us is infinitely greater than he who is against us and that there is no conflict that cannot be won for already the battle belongs to the Lord.

Amen.

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