Ephesians 5 : 1-20

The publicist Max Clifford has been jailed for 8 years after being convicted of a series of indecent assaults over many years - a "master in the art of intimidation", who used his celebrity connections to "bully and manipulate" young women, treating his office as his "sexual fiefdom".

It is what is known as predatory behaviour which involves an intention to actively seek out and injure another person for one’s own ends.

Sadly there are many examples of this in other fields of human society:

* Loan sharks who lend money to people who don’t fully understand the consequences and charge exorbitant interest and use harassment and intimidation to recover their money
* People traffickers who exploit vulnerable would-be migrants
* Character assassination carried out by malicious gossip behind closed doors

These are the things done in darkness, carried out deviously, secretly and shamefully.

In all of us there is a tendency to think of our own wants, desires and needs at the expense of others. In reality we know they are wrong so they are carried out in the shadows, putting on a face of respectability while simultaneously living a dark, deathly side.

A young man I know came to our youth club in Chelmsford when he was about 13. He was a cheeky, but good-natured teenager with the gift of the gab. He almost became a Christian, but turned away. Last year he was convicted for fraud, now in his thirties. Not a small fraud, but a million pounds or more. He had a financial adviser practice and managed to con lots of people out of huge amounts of money including his own family. All to feed a secret gambling habit. At one point he said he would look after my savings!

Paul writing in Ephesians is clear, “**11**Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness” which he catalogues as immorality, impurity and greed.

Don’t have anything to do with them!

Greed is the starting point: "a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to fulfil a need without ever reaching satisfaction."

Immorality is the same thing in the sexual area – endless efforts to fulfil desire without ever being satisfied and which uses and objectifies other people.

Impurity is the end result – we become, sullied, stained and dark in character.

We become fixated on something which may start off as good but becomes an all-consuming object of attention – an idol.

But Paul states, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light”.

The light has come and exposed the darkness but has also gone on to illuminate our lives and show us the way. That is why Jesus, the light, came! His death and resurrection became the searchlight of history, both revealing sin and evil but also lighting up a new direction for us all to follow. We are still in Easter season and light the candle to symbolise that!

It’s interesting to note exactly how Paul phrases this.

He doesn’t say you were once *in* darkness , but now you are *in* light

It’s much stronger than that. It’s describing our state of being.

You **were** darkness

You **are** light

It is not talking about the environment being dark or light but our very lives!

It is because of a radical transformation which has taken place in our lives.

Our motto here at St Francis is A light on the Hill.

It doesn’t literally mean the building, but it means you and me, are shining out with the illumination of God’s love, in our own way!

Phil 2:15 says, “you shine like stars in the dark world”. A lot of the time we don’t recognise it, which is perhaps a good thing, but other people do notice.

One thing is the floating shelter, our winter shelter for the homeless which runs every year in November and December. I have had endless people who live in this community and don’t have anything to do with church say to me that they think it’s a great thing and they would love to be able to help. That is our light shining out. Another example is our youth work. When Alice and Steve used to hold a youth social at their house, I remember one young person asking – why do you do this in your house? People aren’t stupid – they notice what is genuinely good and what is not.

We live in a dark world a lot of the time. In Nigeria over 200 girls have been kidnapped from a boarding school in the Northern part of the country. The government seemed to do little. But our very own Onyeka got together with others and started protest march with placards. The world media caught onto this and now the story has become very high profile and other countries are offering assistance. That is being light in a dark world! We pray for their release swiftly.

And today we give thanks for the life and witness of Kubi Kotey and the way she shone out for you, and we are glad all the family are joining with us today.

**13**But everything exposed by the light becomes visible – and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

Perhaps you are old enough to remember black and white TV. I do. In 1967, colour TV was introduced, although it was pretty ropey. The colours were smeared and fuzzy and sometimes completely wrong.

Have you ever thought that without light there would be no colour at all? In the half-light all the colour fade into dim shades of grey; under full illumination we see the true colours of the world, reflecting their particular hue and bringing pleasure and enjoyment to the viewer. When we shine with the light of Christ we bring that quality of colour to the world, and even this most extraordinary statement – everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

Our lives start to influence others and bring change to them!

My wife occasionally helps out with Guides and she said to me the other day I’ve worked out who is from a Christian family and who isn’t. She said before she knew, she could tell, because there they appear kinder, less materialistic and more helpful than some of the other girls. I’m sure these Christian girls are having an influence whether they realise it or not and are helping others to shine as well. That is the extraordinary job we are given! To shine so brightly ourselves that everything around becomes a light itself.

What can we do?

Just be open about who we are and what we do. When we go to church, casually mention it. When we pray, mention it. I hope Carol doesn’t mind me saying but she comes to morning prayer and she often has to ask permission to come in late. Now all the managers know and often say, “say one for me too”, which we do. It rubs off.

It’s about being authentic and true to ourselves. Don’t hide it. Let your light shine out, let it illuminate others, let it reveal the bad and glorify the good.

Then this church surely will be a light on the hill!

Amen.