

Paint a Picture

I have mentioned before that one of the best times I have had was when I worked as an artist. I began my artwork aged about 16, working at home. I painted all the downstairs walls in my parent's home – murals of landscapes.

While still living there I also made stone sculptures, jewellery, toys, and literally hundreds of hand-made calendars with tiny paintings, and repeated copies of the same local seaside scene!

I have also mentioned that for several years I was asked to paint window murals in a local hospital, even in the isolation unit. I can't remember how it all started, but my time there lasted several years and finished when I met Diane, who became my wife. Nothing to do with her – the hospital had different management.

First time, I was asked to provide a few pictures on windows in the isolation unit, which only had a handful of patients with TB, each with his or her own bedroom. The pictures were to brighten them up for Christmas. I used poster paint, which is easy to apply and could be scraped off in the New Year – by me!

So, I painted the scenes, and staff and patients loved them. Every window pane was covered, and the pictures lit up when the sun shone. The next year, I was asked to extend my efforts to another ward and within days, staff were enthralled and every ward (about ten of them) asked if I could do pictures for them, too! It was hectic, but I loved it.

Each window had a different scene, but I managed to do hundreds of them over about three weeks. The hard bit was going back in the New Year and scraping off the artwork!! But, it was all worth it, because patients and staff enjoyed them. (No, I wasn't paid, but I did get cups of tea).

In the final year, I was asked to do two portraits – one of the Matron (at a time when matrons didn't marry), who lived on the ground floor of the nurses' home in the grounds, and another of the Chief Medical Officer. Both were in their sixties. So, I turned up with oil pastel sticks on the

required evening. I had never used pastels before, so it was rather risky. I did the Matron's portrait first, and immediately went on to do the doctor's. They were delighted with them, and paid me real money!

Apart from enjoying my time there, I also took artistic risks, especially instantly using art materials I had never used before for two portraits! In those days, being younger, I did not even think of risks... I just did what I enjoyed. Sadly, this kind of risk-taking starts to wane as we get older. Frankly, I am willing to take risks even now, but I know that some consequences, if you get it wrong, can get you into an awful lot of strife!

Many think, for example, that I take risks when writing, because I offend some. I have been told that I must shape what I say so as NOT to offend*. This may be so, but, such an attitude does not understand WHY I do what I do. Or, for that matter, what ANY servant of God does. (*Being a 'respector of persons' is condemned by God).

Like any man I can make mistakes. But, when it comes to the things of God, I cannot remember doing that. (Except when I tried to emulate my peers in my first ten years. It was disastrous and I finally realised I was NOT called to preach like that).

Anything outside of God's word can mean problems and when we don't meet people's expectations we can fail in their (secular) eyes. But, that is real life. Most folks never take risks and may as well be 'couch potatoes'. They have many friends and never offend! I am almost envious. (Not really).

It is said that professional drivers (trucks, business cars, etc) are most likely to have accidents. This is simply because they drive more and are most often on the road. The same goes for Christians. Those who do nothing for the Lord will never be castigated, because they say and do nothing. Those of us with a 'public face' (because it is God's will), though, are open to offence – from, and to, others. It is bound to happen. Again, all to do with risks.

As a man called to service by God to a high-risk ministry, I am bound to offend someone at some time. Not intentionally, but by telling God's word and showing its principles for life. Others, in dog-collars or not, get away with being sweet, saying nothing to offend, and then retiring into a tranquil but fruitless retirement. God gives us risks!

But, this is where I depart from those in such a deadly way of living, where I would sit quietly and do not offend. In the things of God my path is clear – I do whatever God demands of me. This can be anything, and is always rooted firmly in God's word. It doesn't matter what it is. When God calls me to a task I do it as He wants me to do it. I often think it is risky (to my relationship with others), but I cannot just stop doing what God wants. Few are given such a ministry, and I don't really understand why I have such a one. There have been times when I wished I could just hand it all back to God, with its continuous traumas... but that isn't an option.

When I do what God wants, I do it according to His ways and demand (though many think I am just doing what I want to do for my own reasons). In itself this can offend others, who think I go 'too far' (I was even told I went too far by quoting scripture). They also think I do it of my own volition and use ideas from my own mind. This is far from the truth and, quite often, I wish I could just do nothing at all, so as to avoid possible friction. Yet, although what I do is risky, it is of God. Once I refuse or avoid doing what God demands, I know I will be facing His disapproval. So, I continue... and gather human disapproval instead! And, at 'low' times in my life I can trip up and offend, not from God but from myself. Oh how careful God's men must be!

Now, as I enter my 74th year, I would like to stop, but I know I cannot, in spite of a few errors on the way. I am now in the middle of shifting all my books from the study, leaving the computer and desk. I will bring my easel from the shed and start painting again after a number of years of nothing. The last time I painted I did so after the fashion of Amedeo Modigliani, where I elongated the figures (mainly so they looked shorter when viewed from a sitting position). So, I wonder if I will continue like that, or start a different 'style'? (I admit to preferring impressionist work, but ANY art that isn't ugly or immoral is liked).

I must be honest (hopefully always)... when I look back on things I have said and done, I recognise when I did not do so well, and offended folks I should not have, when straying into my own mind. BUT – that, my friends, is part of life. And when I offend because of what GOD says, well, I can't alter that, because I must speak as He leads, even if some then take me to task or walk away. So, paint a picture, reader! And take those risks persuaded by God! Taking risks is, well, risky! But, if you care too much for how people perceive you, then you will do nothing, for fear of offending. What a sad way to live!

Not Just the Queen!

The Queen once spoke of how horrible her year had been, when her family, and other issues,

blasted her business around the world.

So, this year, I joined her. Covid was the least of it, and as most know I fell in a supermarket on the stairs because of the mask I was wearing. As I write I am still aching in several of my body's parts! So, not only the Queen has a boxful of woes!

But, no matter. I'm not on earth for long (many wish my time was even shorter!). Unlike my pre-Flood relatives I won't be here long enough to pester everyone with critical analyses... especially not if I fall down some more stairs!

Most of the upset this year is due to Covid rules. Not the illness itself, but the sinful and deliberate way governments resort to totalitarianism. The saddest part is that many people seem quite willing to obey the 'law' and allow their lives to be fully ruled by government. Well, after my fall, no more masks! I refuse. (Because it is law, I instead hang a plastic sign around my neck, saying I am exempt... bought from Amazon. Even this is because I am forced into it!

Though the fall was caused by the mask, I am grateful to God for protecting me – most men of my age would have fractured their hip, or tibia (the front of the leg), or the elbow I also fell on. But, all I got were bumps and bruises and one cut. My biggest earthly fear is not being able to look after my wife, Diane. The fall could easily have scuppered that. But, I honestly believe that though God did not protect me from the sudden fall from upright to flat on my behind, He DID save me from serious injury. So, I was blessed by His help, and am grateful for still being able to look after Diane. Even dark clouds have a silver lining! Always praise God, don't sulk or glower!

I Don't 'Do' Sermons

Over the years, a steady number of visitors have tried our Sunday meetings, but most find them odd, or they can't tolerate them – They are not what they consider to be 'services'! This is because I don't 'do' sermons. Nor do we sing hymns, Nor do we have group prayer. To many this might sound very unbiblical... until we look at the issues properly. The way we 'do church' was borne out of a lengthy growing problem with unscriptural 'tradition' and unbiblical behaviour.

Singing is used mainly as a break, to separate speaking parts in most standard churches (if people are honest). Yes, we can enjoy singing the good old hymns – but how many of us examine what we are singing? Do we know what the contents of a hymn are? Are those contents consistent with scripture (because many aren't). Do we sing with a full heart and an aware mind or do we just go into singing mode automatically, repeating hymns we have never examined? So, we don't 'do' hymns. They might be enjoyable, but they are usually sung without thought.

We don't 'do' group prayer for a very good reason – Christ told us, very specifically, to pray privately, with no-one else around us. Check it out – He told us to pray in our closet. And for those brave enough to read my book (or articles) on prayer, I show that group prayer was not routinely practised by the apostles – especially not scheduled! The only time Christians met as a group for prayer was when told to do so by urgency and having the same mind – something I have rarely, if ever, witnessed in traditional churches. It is even rarer in scripture. We have prayed together maybe three times for an urgent matter. This is consistent with what scripture says.

As for sermons... I used to deliver them in my first ten years as a believer, until God showed me a far better way! (No, I'm not talking about thunder and special revelations, just finally searching God's word for answers).

Frankly, I wonder why on earth I delivered sermons! They are, really, spoken essays, with no room for questions or comments. No wonder folks go to sleep.

Jesus spoke as led by His own spirit, as did the apostles. During a sermon the preacher talks non-stop. By the time he is finished, any questions or comments have been lost. Also, a sermon is subject/topic centred, which means the poor preacher has to find another topic for next week. I don't find this helpful to him or to the listeners; there is no continuity or relevance. As with almost everything we now do, as a church we examined everything we once knew. We dropped what was unhelpful or useless, and continued in what we know God demanded. It is this God-led life that prevented me from accepting three invitations to pastor churches, two with pay (cutely called a stipend). I knew the congregation wouldn't last long without heavy traditional input!

I must emphasise that the way we now 'do church' has been a long process, and still continues, as we promised the Lord we would do what He told us to do in His word. It took me just over ten

years to come to genuine conclusions, so I understand that so many preachers and pastors still follow the 'old' ways based on tradition (there are good and there are useless traditions. We cast aside all that has no spiritual worth).

Many believe a great example of a sermon was when Jesus gave the 'sermon on the mount'. They believe He was preaching to the assembled crowds. No, it wasn't a sermon, nor was it delivered to the crowds. Rather, He was speaking privately with His apostles, giving much needed teaching for their future use. Thus, I no longer 'do' sermons! Instead, I 'do' Bible studies that are useful and follow on week after week, so members receive solid teaching and interpretations they can use in their lives on a daily basis; and every example I give is found in our everyday lives. And, each week they know what is coming, so prepare by prayer and reading. Sermons don't really do that so their usefulness can be dubious.

All of this makes it hard for those who don't really know us, to follow what is going on! They can't get used to the discussion aspect of the meeting, or that we don't sing or pray! As I said recently, we should sing to the Lord – and I do when at home. If anyone wishes to sing in our meetings, well, they can, if led to do so. Only on three occasions in 40 years have we had group prayer for an urgent matter.

The aim is simple – to allow the Holy Spirit to take us along His path, not our own. Sermons are a lot of very hard work on the part of the speaker – but, I honestly wonder why they are a staple of church life. And the fact that a preacher must find another topic for the following week seems an odd thing to do, when scripture is there before us, giving enough material to last a lifetime. Conversely, I KNOW the Lord wants us to teach His word in order, with clarity, showing how real-time life is referred to in Bible studies. The aim is to build ourselves up in Him, with a dynamic approach. And by teaching and fielding questions and comments, rather than speaking for an hour non-stop, we can all discover God's word as a lively and active part of our lives. We find it vibrant anyway! (Each preacher/teacher/pastor is called to his own ministry, and must perform it as he is led).

Though this is brief, I am telling readers what WE do. Others are free to do something else, if the Lord allows, so long as it isn't stifled or misled by poor tradition. It all sounds very odd, because all of us were brought up along traditional lines, many of which are not scriptural. Our church decided only authentic meetings will take place, having scripture as our guide. The rest is tradition. God bless!

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Easel on the Move!

As I commented earlier, at last I am able to move stuff around my house! First I bought cheap shelving from IKEA. My son and I put it together yesterday and he cleared space for it upstairs. I still have a larger second shelving unit to assemble, but that can only be done when I have shifted other stuff around (it is complicated!). At least it's a start! That means I can now take the books out of my study and bring my easel down from the shed and resume my artwork after years of being unable to do so! That's a big thing. Then, I can move the exercise bike from my study to the shed, leaving space in my study for the easel. I have already started this logistical process – boy, it takes a long time!

Since Diane slipped down into her current state in 2013 I stopped doing much in the house. Then, everything came to a grinding halt in 2016, when she became immobile and we had to move everything around, so as to bring the bed downstairs. To put it at its most basic, I no longer saw the place as our home but only as a sick room with adjoining storage areas. The trouble was, with all the moving around I no longer had anywhere to put anything. So, I lost interest.

But, then I had an idea and it looks like I can now, at last, clear the place. I have Covid to thank for that!! We have been stopped from holding physical meetings every Sunday (we meet virtually), so I can now use the dining room table to put all my books on top, without having to

move them again for Sundays. Believe me, this idea is small but terrifically useful, given the past few years of total stoppage and mess.

The loss of interest was because my wife, Diane, no longer was able to acknowledge what was going on, and as she has been unable to speak, too, we do not even have the chance to discuss things as we used to; I now sit beside her unable to communicate and the grief runs deep. So, the old stumbling block arose: "What's the point?" After all, I reasoned, everything I did with the house was for her. Now, it seemed, there was just me and I was stuck in literally one chair in one room.

No, it wasn't some form of depression (but very close). It was more like a very deep unexpressed sigh, part of the general grief I feel for losing her to dementia. But, with my idea because of Covid, came a change of heart... I will continue to turn the house back into a home again. This is why it is vital to get rid of stuff and move things around so the rooms are no longer just a warehouse. I will also remove the usual things that make a room a sick room – meds, ointments, and so on. Don't really know what to do with them yet, but it is my intention.

I look forward to again making the home look nice for Diane, even if she cannot really see or notice it... but, ***I can see it*** and want to honour her while she is still with me.

Really, this is behind everything I do for the Lord – I can see and hear myself, and even if I am the only one left in the world, I must stand firm and honour the Lord. So, also, I must look upon it as putting things right for myself. Now that Covid has forced us all not to meet together, I can use the time and space to move things around and throw out things not needed. Once we start to meet together again, I will lose the space! God can shine through darkness to reveal His amazing love for us. Earlier I said I don't 'do' sermons... but, I can certainly 'do' what I need to do for Diane.

Never give up on genuine dreams and motives. Allow God to light your way and He will also show you how/what to do, at the right time. For the moment we are studying Psalms again, before beginning a study of Job. I am glad for this, because the Psalms always display the spiritual effervescence of David, who praised God in everything!

Right – back to work... putting more books on the table. Soon, when I bring the easel down, I

will know I have 'arrived'! (Well, until the New Year, when I must begin to throw out things not needed. But, that's another story!). I have been working at ministry for over fifty five years, non-stop. Now, I am feeling tired. I never moved away or took a job that used up all my time, for the sake of our small church. It is why I refused several offers of a pastorate in the UK. My income never gave me much, but I was given great energy by God to do His will. Everything turns on obeying God to the best of our ability.

Yes, I fail as most men do, but God looks at the heart, not his outer dealings. I thank Him for that. I look at many Christians who appear not to do anything for the Lord and wonder how they can survive. Yet, they do, and I am not my brother's keeper! So, tired or not, I will reflect for a few weeks and hopefully bounce back with more energy. I will leave all that to the Lord.

I had all kinds of human plans in my earlier life. Some came to fruition but most did not. I discovered that no matter what I wanted to do, God pushed or pulled me to do something else! Never resist this, my friends, because to do so is to resist God (remember what I said earlier about taking risks). In the end, it is what you do to serve the Lord that counts (that is, if you are saved and obedient in the first place).

Though I have rarely ever had money, I look back and wonder why I wanted it – God has given me much more than money; I have His peace and power within. By comparison everything else is either futile or a fake dream. And if doing the Lord's work tires you out, or brings wrath from others, or even leads to your death, well, that is how it should be... the Lord is in control, even when we don't realise or acknowledge it.

Meanwhile, in my own life, I wait for a 'sucker punch'. It is just a vague foreboding, and I hope I am wrong, but that's my feeling. We are all on the verge of awful things. The world is turning against Christians and what we stand for. Their hatred is open and wicked. None if it makes logical sense! But, logic and truth no longer matter to unbelievers, who just want to hate and ruin, using secrecy as a cloak. Things are changing, friends. So, go after your dreams before the world decides we are no longer worthy of life.

Water, Water, Everywhere!

We learn every day! I once thought (as did many creationists) the water that fell during the Flood (as well as spouted upwards from the deep) came only from the sky. But, that idea has been superseded by another Creationist idea – the water that fell from above was in outer

space, not in the atmosphere! Isn't that interesting – that there may still be huge amounts of water in space? Or, perhaps even soaked into planets (Mars?). I refer to this later hypothesis in my new book, Noah's Flood (hopefully out in January 2020).

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Recipes to Impress!

If you want to impress family and friends with your culinary prowess, try two recipes I tried (once). Both are very simple.

The first is to boil a pan of sugar until it bubbles. Then, place bananas cut into short lengths into the boiling liquid for a while.

The other is to place a bagful of chestnuts onto a tray and put them into a high temperature oven, preheated, for about half an hour. You will impress everyone as the bananas burst forth onto the walls, ceiling and floor, and anything else in the way, changing your décor dramatically, whilst almost singing a splurging sound. And the chestnuts will explode delightfully like bullets into the tiniest bits imaginable and stick rock-hard on every part of your oven. Go on, give them a go. As I said, I tried them. Once.

Jews and Satan

Just as many modern Jews don't believe in the God Who made them special, so some attach odd meanings to who Satan is and what he does. This is particularly true of the occultish

Kabbalah.

Jewish teachers often refer to the yetzer hara, the things that prevent an human being from doing what God says. (I prefer to call it sin). In the Kabbalistic books, Satan can be warded off by magic, amulets and exorcism. Thus, by using these sources Jews aid Satan in his evil work.

Satan as an actual individual, HaSatan (THE Satan) occurs only twice in the Hebrew bible, acting as an accuser (a term known to Christians). The troubling association made by these Jews is that Satan remains in the 'divine court' as God's agent... even though God tells us he was thrown out of Heaven and is evil.

These Jewish sources also say Satan was the angel of death in Egypt (source: the tractate Bava Batra, and borrowed by several charismatic teachers) and the influential Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, adds that Satan is not a real person but only an idea, a symbol for the yetzer hara. He also proclaims the Book of Job to be fictional... thus himself taking the side of a yetzer hara!!

In the occultish Kabbalah, Satan is named Sama'el (the Great Demon). His demons are simply referred to as the Sitra Achra ('the other side'). And to make matters worse, they say Satan had a wife, Lilith... who was, supposedly, none other than Eve!! I will say no more on this, because it doesn't help our understanding of God's word. Suffice to say that I have warned readers a few times – Christians should be VERY careful when using Jewish sources, including newer Hebrew bibles. They can damage faith and knowledge. Judaism was abolished by Christ Himself, so why listen to its teachings, when they are no longer valid and do not save?

The Shape of Sin

Little has shaped my life in the past 15 years more than understanding my own sinful nature. What I mean is that when thrown back into the Lord's provision, grace and mercy, I resorted to Him even more than before. That is why, every single day since 2005, I have examined my inner self to root out sin. Only then could I look to God for His help.

This has been my life every day, because, as I keep saying, I am nobody. But, in Christ, I am the Lord's and strive to show it at every instant. Knowledge of myself shapes who I now am. Before 2005 it was only partially formed though genuine.

Since God called me to His service, I have endeavoured to live as His servant – sometimes failing but mostly trying. Those around me think they know who and what I am, but really, few

do. But, I know myself, and that is why I examine my heart and soul every day of my remaining years. I really am genuine and striving, every moment of every day.

Don't let human motives and human desires carry you off into fantasy! Don't just think of God as your Sunday devotion! He is our very life. It is He Who keeps us safe and gives us the very breath in our lungs. Oh how we let God down, time and again! I just wish I had been more devoted when I was a teen saved from my deserved punishment! Since then I learned very fast and have changed (this is not a boast but a reflection of my sin). Will YOU look to yourself and change?

Furor Loquendi

Western governments are full of this – furor loquendi... a mania for speaking! This has been no more true than today, when politicians (NOT real scientists or doctors) are declaring a wisdom they don't have, by spending our money on Green deals, homosexual programs, the promotion of Islam and the frightening of everyone with Covid. What they spout is lies or lies mingled with bits of truth. Lockdowns don't stop a virus. That has been shown us by science. Masks don't work... another fact of science. Staying six feet apart is ridiculous, since viruses can travel tens of yards when expelled with force (coughs, sneezes, shouting, etc). But, our well-paid representatives (who don't ever represent us, only themselves) harangue us daily with many words that mean absolutely nothing.

The latest nonsense is about the variant SARSCoV2 (re COVID-19), that it 'might' spread quickly via children (thus scaring every parent witless, while, at the same time, they will target anyone who refuses a mask, etc). The emphasis is on the 'might' – NOT a word of science, but of propaganda. The politicians also tell us the variant spreads more quickly... but they DON'T tell us that though it might spread quicker, it is of the same virulence as the original virus!! That fact is covered up or muted, otherwise we would find out that what they are actually saying is "There is a new variant, but it acts the same way as far as outcomes are concerned". Thus – nothing to worry about as almost all humans who get it are okay anyway (99.6%). Come on friends – get a grip and complain!! Or, at least educate your friends and congregations.

John 15:5. 2 Corinthians 12:11

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