



St Columba's United Reformed Church
 Alfred Street
 Oxford
 Lent through Easter 2011

Ash Wednesday

Communion/Eucharist/ Lord's Supper

Oil on strips of canvas, mounted on reclaimed window frame; 2001

The Easter gospel applies to individuals as much as to groups of people and churches. This painting shows only one element about which the churches are called to confess; yet, it is individuals who claim truth and who are called to repent. Ash Wednesday calls us to such a focus of repentance.



This work started from an idea of strips of canvas. On the strips, I painted strips. Then rising to my conscious mind came the brokenness of the Church, which renders me so angry and hurt. What should be a fellowship meal like any large family, with some members who get on and some who do not, has become that which divides more powerfully than any external agent. This work is a metaphor for that division with yet the golden reminder that though we divide ourselves, Holy Spirit entwines and connects us even so. The title indicates our inability even to call the single dividing liturgy by a single name.

Lent 1

That You May Have Life

Oil on canvas mounted on glass; 2007

The Lent 1 readings are about calling humanity to trust God above all else. This painting alludes to the rainbow promise that God is trustworthy and it, by its title, reminds us of Jesus' promise to bring Life.



Rainbows are huge for me. I love them because I have to find the dark to see them. Placing my back to the light, pursuing the search in the dark clouds, there they are - all the colours in the universe arching in shining bows, reminding the dark that it is only vapour. This just catches a moment. The glass mount is just that, glass. The rainbow is the light, the glass almost water. The title is from the gospel of John; "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly".

Lent 2

From Which you were hewn

Oil on canvas, mounted on slate; 1999

Lent 2 tells of the huge blessings only possible from God and that it is the whole of the human called to respond. This painting, when seen with guidance, shows bodies rising from the earth – primordial shaping, with the title reminding us that we have been made beyond our understanding and that the whole of our selves are called to God.



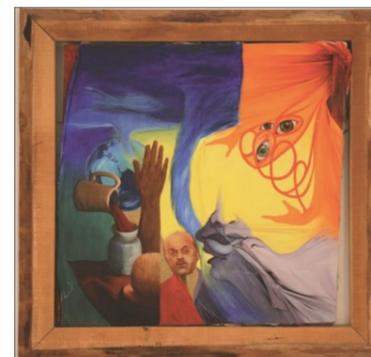
In this calm, which reminds me of my loved Lake District, I see Creator God. The title comes from Isaiah 51, a plea for the created to remember their creator. From that creator rises life, hinting to what may be seen in the shape of the rocks in this work. Mounting on slate emphasised the rock supporting all creations and journeys.

Lent 3

Wisdom Dove Speaks

Oil on Sewn canvas, tied and stretched on a shed window frame, surrounded by oak; 1992

Lent 3 is calling us to see as God sees, if possible, honouring all God has done and honouring each individual no matter what may be known. This painting summarises the creation story, with the 'fallout' being the behaviour of individuals with the world – seeing the world, sharing in communion elements (and therefore justice).



This was painted in 1992 when I was Artist in Residence for the United Reformed Church Forum conference, planned to look at the roots of the URC; I couldn't help but go back to the roots of our faith altogether. To me, the right side is rather like the knowledge of God as shared before Jesus Christ and the left, that knowledge as made human in the world. The Spirit (Wisdom Dove) is everywhere.

Lent 4

Holy Saturday

oil on tied and stretched canvas; 1991

Lent 4 reminds us that God touches us when we probably don't know God is there. This painting's character is curled in a self contained pain, but the rainbow fabric reminds the viewer of the rainbow promise that God is about life and is present when we can't see God. The character has a sense of this, yet the painting allows us as observers to see the truth. The title of the painting is from a Lenten time a little later on, but the subject of being called to know God even when we can't see God is a universal theme, here called up in the fourth week of Lent.



This was the beginning of so much. The canvas started as fabric stretched across a frame with a soldier facing horrors – a Remembrance Sunday image, still seen if you look at the back. Not needed for worship any longer, it became a mount for something else. Compelled by a dear friend in 1991, I painted what I felt angry about. The hand, out-stretched and touching a rainbow of fabric could not be painted closed in to the body, no matter how much I tried. The sheer process of trying to close it in while it tried to reach the light was hard work indeed. So I gave up and it does what it wanted – touches the rainbow. The name indicates the time between the death and resurrection of Jesus. Death is known and life is not quite there yet, but there is a hint somewhere. This is my version of that in-between time.

Lent 5

Darkness is as Light to You

Oil on Board 2007

Lent 5's message is strongly reminding us that it is God who gives life and we are called to renew ourselves by allowing ourselves to 'die'. This painting is a progression of that renewal, showing that even in the dark, God's light sparkles and the new grain is from the dead seed. The scripture title reminds us of that truth.



This painting begins to touch the deeply personal. It is a triptych, the panels created for a commission which never quite happened, but about which I am delighted to have the panels. I had no idea what would be here. I painted the centre first, catching my shadow against the panel as I stood in my studio. The left hand panel came next, with the little girl sheltering herself not from the night, but from the darkness heaped upon her. She found her occupations and her source of light. The right hand panel was the last, evoking the faith message of harvest from grains. Gold glows all around. The title is from Psalm 139, always my companion: "If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.'"

Palm Sunday

Behold, I am Doing a New Thing

Oil on canvas with boxes 2007

By both the Triumphal Entry passages and the Passion Sunday narratives, we are reminded that God is close at hand – and, building on the previous messages, may very well be in unexpected places (like isolation). This painting shows a new thing from old, a slow revealing of a new thing, unexpectedness in where God could be found (the mundane). The scripture title calls us to see the new as a progression (*doing*, as compared to have done).



I had no idea what this would be. My MSN messaging name is 'Red shoes are lovely' and I have a thing about red shoes. One day I noticed the progression from red boots to red shoes and realised there was a liberating element to the change. Another day, I sketched out a woman coming out of a person shaped cupboard, the woman's body being more or less clearly seen, the cupboard shaped as voluminous clothes, hiding the human shape. It became an emergence from what was (for so long) to what was beginning to be. So here it is. The boxes are all sorts of symbols and reality. The painted box in the middle always held vitamins, the boxes on either side, jewellery. All ways of managing. They are open here, as the things they stand for are now. The title comes from another favourite Bible passage, Isaiah 43.19: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."

Easter

The Stone was Rolled Away

Oil on canvas with gauze and ribbon 2007

The Easter message of this exhibition ends up at the Church where it began, the institution called to renewal as much as the people. The blaze of fabric and colour in the bottom right show an undefined renewal and the title reminds us of the resurrection event.



I woke one morning with this picture on my brain. I could see the vaulted ceiling of a huge cathedral and I could see a small person - minimised and apparently ignored by the immensity of the institution of the church. But as I painted, I couldn't manage the person in the bottom right hand corner and realised that s/he shouldn't be there. Suddenly fabric burst forth with colour and movement and shape. As I watched this grow, it became a statement of my distance from, yet attachment to, the institutional church. The church and its core creeds have told me of love when I wished particular people might have. I have been ordained and upheld by the church, even with my own deep critique of it. I both belong to it and fly out of it.

The Artist,

Elizabeth Gray-King



Growing up as an artist and ballet dancer in the United States, Elizabeth received a fine arts degree from George Washington University in 1975. Moving to England in 1977, she was a professional painter and illustrator before being ordained as a United Reformed Church Minister in 1988, having been trained at Mansfield College, Oxford. At many individual times, she has designed clothing, from ballet costumes to clothes for women clerics contributing to her use of fabric in her works. A further degree in Education from Westminster College, Oxford, coincided with her setting up a social enterprise with her husband, Pete, within which she project manages research and other projects. She is employed part-time as the Education for Ministry (Phase 2/3) Officer for the United Reformed Church. She exhibits widely, creates art works within worship and frequently acts as Artist in Residence in conferences. Her work comes out of this entire context - life, faith and design.

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