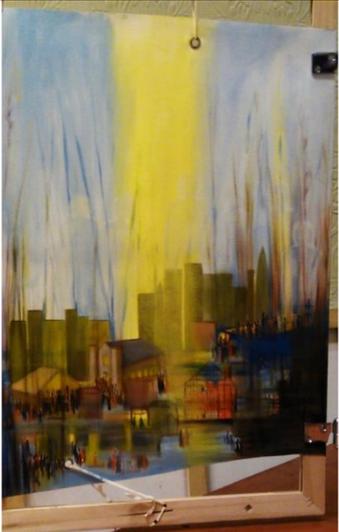


Arrival	Friday evening Sessions	Saturday morning	Saturday morning through afternoon			
						
<p>We arrived to Assembly in the rain. As I was setting up, I started painting the arrivals. The rain was epic, and people arrived drenched having struggled with travelling, carrying luggage, and finding their place in a range of ways. As I walked across the bridge to the Spa Centre, I looked down to see many people on the beach and I was struck by the reflections of those in the rain.</p> <p>The rain enabled me to tell some truth without exposing detail. The reality of the weather was the truth of drenched bodies. A deeper truth was that many Assembly members and URC staff felt drenched in mind and spirit, unsure of what Assembly would bring and feeling vulnerable from various bits of the most recent URC history.</p> <p>A difficult truth is that in some of the words I heard around me as I painted, some people arrived intending to bring gloom with an uncomfortable intentionality to some of the darkness</p>	<p>As sessions began, I looked quickly to the main floor and stage of Assembly. Streaks of purple and fuchsia rose from the stage to ceiling around the large screen and members tables were set with dark red cloths. I started painting a few tables with people sitting and talking and painted the clear lectern with a robed figure.</p> <p>Then speeches began and people began to flow. Jubilee ministers, Moderators reflections full of encounters, Nominations Committee, new ministers – all danced around my mind and the painting was left with one table and a flow of people. It became clear to me that the few people at Assembly were enabled to be there, held there, by the good work of so many.</p> <p>Then the newly inducted Moderator spoke. And as he did, light appeared. The spaces between the rainy people became lighter and the people below the table gained halos – the saints in all of our congregations, the saints in all of our partnerships. Not all grew halos, but many did.</p> <p><i>Halos for saints became a recurring image.</i></p>	<p>Amongst all those who were introduced were ecumenical guests and overseas guests. I heard quite suddenly that our URC is much wider than the UK. The tiny world shape at the bottom of the flow of people is bright sky and sand with a flow of people in other parts of our world.</p> <p>As I was aware of so many people and how few were the number in Assembly compared to all our partners and colleagues, I became aware of the cloud of witness; the saints who went before. I went back to the arrivals image to paint in some witnesses above the heads of the arriving members.</p> <p><i>A cloud of witnesses became a recurring image.</i></p>	<p>The Bible study led us through an intriguing view of the Moses story. The tiny Moses basket at the bottom left of the black and blue layers sits amongst bulrushes.</p> <p>I saw oppression, and people in darkness. Realising that oppression is something people do to people, there are layers here – floors with people above standing on the heads of those below. Yet, there are saints touched by the Spirit who walk out and help others as the women in the Moses narrative; the red people in this image.</p> <p>Then I heard what I had not heard before about the Moses story. People meeting him as a man thought that he couldn't be truly Hebrew; all men his age were killed as children. In a sense, one considered dead was alive, bringing leadership and God's message. One thought dead, alive. The paradigm screamed at me and shards of light shot from the Moses basket to the skies, hinting to the later truth of Jesus.</p> <p><i>The colour red for the Holy Spirit and bulrushes became recurring images.</i></p>	<p>The picture repeatedly packed in images. From the Synod Moderators' Report to the Moderators Think Tank to Finance, I saw churches in all shapes and sizes, and in odd relationship to each other. A comment in discussion gave the image of the Holy Spirit locked in a cage.</p> <p>The General Secretary of the World Council of Churches brought us images of churches firmly planted in the midst of the world, so buildings began to rise behind the churches. As I painted the buildings I reflected that it is easy to see corporate buildings as images of evil; yet those buildings are inhabited by vulnerable human beings, some of them as enslaved as the Hebrews of old. So the buildings had to be green, indicating that there was rich ground for transformation.</p> <p>The Mission Report told some hard stories of the world in which we do mission and the hard realities of so many people's lives. The bottom right corner of this land of churches in the world became dark with brown and purple boxes which I thought were other sorts of buildings, some visited by saints and spirit filled people. Yet the buildings turned to water and I saw the murky waters in which people feel drowned. As I turned those buildings into murky water, I realised that there needed to be water over the remaining panel, able to indicate that some people and churches can feel all 'at sea'.</p>	<p>This shot of light arrived rapidly and furiously, immediately after the resolution about Civil Partnerships able, but not demanded, to be offered by URC churches.</p> <p>It showed the overwhelming feeling of light filling otherwise dark places.</p> <p>It reached to the caged Holy Spirit and stopped, hinting to the reality that for some, the resolution meant that the Spirit is still caged.</p> <p>The light below the caged Spirit is reflected light.</p> <p><i>Bright yellow for the light of God became a recurring image.</i></p>	<p>The more I heard, light appeared in churches and they reflected wonderful light.</p> <p>Then the bulrushes appeared, growing out of the water in all colours indicating some good reeds and some strangling ones. The church building I had painted at the far right of this church/world land, intending to show a concrete commercial sort of church shape slowly became an open topped shape amongst bulrushes. Sort of the church as a modern Moses basket. Something considered dead now alive in new ways?</p> <p><i>This particular colour blue of the open topped church became a recurring colour for the URC</i></p>

Sunday Morning		Sunday afternoon		Sunday evening
				
<p>I stayed by my canvasses on Sunday morning, not able to take all my equipment to the Church. I worshipped along with the rest by filling out more details on the first panel and by starting the bay. I knew that I wanted to place Assembly firmly in Scarborough and I knew that the Church to which Assembly went for worship and from which it marched in witness was on a hill. I needed a bay of water and hills so started painting.</p> <p>With the bay, I knew I could finish the water theme if it seemed I should. I wanted a beach so there was some way for the people in the URC Moses basket to walk out of their basket and move up the hill. As I painted them walking, I began to remember other Biblical references to deserts and beaches.</p> <p>The lower section of the water took on the murkiness of the previous panel and the bulrushes came back.</p>	<p>The hills grew and a church was sited on top. The people wound their way out, across more hills and arrived at the Queen Victoria Memorial in order to mark their witness. As the day went on, the cloud of witnesses joined the march and one came out of the sky to be with the marching people. By the end of Monday session, I managed to add the tiny balloons.</p> <p>Light shone on the group and literally and figuratively, the dark clouds became more present and the rain enters again.</p> <p>Halos appear around some and not all, Spirit people are amongst the crowd and the banners of witness can be seen. There are tall people, short people and people of all colours.</p>	<p>Back in the Assembly Hall, Reports flew about Youth and Children's Work, Ministries and Westminster College. Interfaith guests joined the Moderator in prayer. Finance reported and there was news from Mission Council. I heard groups and groups of people of all shapes and sizes, each with a particular ministerial focus.</p> <p>These circles grew, flowing in circular energy down the hill from the height of the mission witness. In each circle grew little groups of people. A view is that each circle is a group of self interest, like minded people in a bubble amongst others and indeed, the bottom left circle people all look in on each other. Another view is that these are groups of particular ministries, gathered within the mission field to carry out particular types of work. As I grew to this more generous interpretation, the space between the hill, the water and the circles indeed became a mission field, hinting at the grain hills around Scarborough. There are tiny harvesters dotted between the circles, haloed and harvesting.</p>	<p>Money. It is unavoidable, it was the open or hidden part of almost every report. So it has to be clear and obvious in this painting.</p> <p>At the point it was painted, people were feeling uncomfortable about money. Yet, after the Monday morning scripture about the Good Samaritan, we were reminded that it was money by which the Samaritan offered continuing care to the injured robbed one. I worked on this section again, giving the money more grace and colour, allowing it to be both exposed and encouraging.</p>	<p>The Gospeller John's story of the Samaritan Woman at the well was brought alive in the Bible Study. Here is the water jar, the jug, held by the clear hand of the mystical woman. Jesus is the other mystical figure and they both stand at the top section of all the painting, one with the cloud of witnesses.</p> <p>The jug had to be painted around the final circle I had painted earlier; the circle with people of old and young, a number of colours and a person coming in or going out. The people in that circle had changed for some reason from the other circles. Perhaps being surrounded by the vessel for living water was the reason.</p> <p>And then I had a moment of revelation.</p> <p>The water coming out of the jug meant that the water theme had not just been because of the rainy weather. The water from the first panel flowing to the bay in the second panel became one with the Living Water coming from the jug in the third panel. There had to be water at the base of every panel, merging with the water of murky life, mixing with the water of churches at sea, flowing with the water amongst the rushes holding our URC Moses basket as well as the Moses story. The water had to hold the bubbles of people. Suddenly, all the water was living water, able to refresh and transform all.</p>

Monday morning



After the worship on Monday morning, I raced to my canvas to paint 18 strips of cloth. At a Friday evening session, members were asked to staple the squares of fabric they had brought into strips. By Monday morning, they had become stoles placed on the shoulders of representatives from the 13 URC Synods, Church House and 4 URC Resource Centres for Learning. The separate colours brought at the beginning became signs of commitment shared with the remainder of the church. Work from those first tables, shown in the first panel, were shared with the saints also shown below in the first panel.

This moment had to be depicted. And as I painted furiously, counting as I went along, I realised that I could add a real strip of fabric. So I did.

As I heard remaindered business and heard the hard work put in by two reference groups to present edited resolutions, I sensed such a movement of God's light. The jug had to become full of light, light had to be painted inside every one of those circles of people, just as those circles became bubbles with water reflections on each one.

I moved more quickly as the time was full of one issue after another, some left with less time than people would have preferred. Yet the desire to honour all issues and all people fuelled my urgency to keep lighting up the moments.

As I turned to the stage occasionally, I was reminded of the shots of colour, so here they are again as at the start. But they have that URC blue and that God light on each side. The strips have much colour, all mixed from the colours on the other panels – all mixed from the colour of Assembly itself.

As Assembly ended, the water rushed from the jug and formed a large stream reflecting the colours from the strips/stoles.

And so it finished.

It started with three blank canvasses, stretched to frames, jet with space at the top and bottom. The three canvasses merged to a kind of strip, to me, reminiscent of our Old Testament scrolls. Each canvas is tied to a frame, as if it were possible to tie our scriptures and our church to a clear framework. The separate canvasses indicate that the URC is a church of separate bodies, joined together. The hinges are sturdy, yet quick release, an indication that the URC was never intended to be a permanent denomination, but would take itself apart to re-form with other churches if that was the Call. I had no idea what would appear on the prepared canvas.

From the doused beginning, I was able to see that dousing not one of misery, but one of grace. The colours at the end are my real impression of hope, not an aspiration of hope. Yes, people went away angry. They will. Some expected to depart angrily. They did. My overwhelming feeling was of far more hope than anyone truly expected, with tangible steps to honour history, heal hurt and plan creatively to adapt to God's new world for our, and all, churches.

The final piece is called Living Water.

