

I've never painted so much in my life

Baptist evangelist and former President Chris Duffett works bi-vocationally as an artist. He shares a little about what he has seen during the pandemic – and how art has helped both him and others

Painting has been healing for me during this time. I've never painted so much! As an artist I find painting a place of solace and comfort. With the loss of gathering in community, I was able to find

some comfort in creativity, and this has been important in helping me process what's happened in the pandemic.

I hope it's helped others too. Not only have I painted as an act of worship, but I have also had lots of commissions - people must have been in lockdown looking at their blank walls and thought 'I need a Chris Duffett painting!'

I believe art speaks. It has been such a privilege to be able to paint during the painful time of Covid and bring some prophetic messages through the painting, that have brought comfort. It feels like there have been some big themes that I have I

encountered as I have painted which I believe Jesus wanted to communicate.

Allowing my paintings to speak is counterintuitive for me. As an evangelist I want to do a lot of explaining and presenting of the truth; as an artist I let the painting do the talking, and pray that the Holy Spirit communicates in ways that words can't quite.

Over the page are three images that have brought something of hope that I believe have spoken to people:





Cosmic Christ

A month or two before lockdown one (I don't think we called it that then!) the phrase I kept coming back to in prayer was 'Jesus is Lord.' I wanted to capture his Lordship in a painting, that the Jesus we serve is the living Christ, the one in whom all will bow the knee and confess that he is Lord, so despite the cheesy images associated with hands holding the world (all sing now, 'He's got the whole world, in his hands...') I could do nothing but paint hands holding the world. That symbolism even became a front cover for a *Baptists Together* magazine.

At The Light College when the nature of the pandemic became apparent and there was a lot of fear around we prayed and declared his Lordship.

It's a new day

Some paintings I've done recently have helped me make sense of the end of restrictions. One is 'The Chrysalis' – for many of us we are coming out of that liminal place where we have been stuck, uncertain of what is to come, but there really is new life. We have a certain hope with Jesus.

One is the cocoon - we are coming out of the enclosed, there is new life – and this seems to be giving hope. I keep hearing the Isaiah 43:19 "*Look, I'm doing a new thing!*" And the beautiful image of the cocoon captures that.

I've also felt compelled to paint new dawn scenes. Over five days, I painted four huge scenes.



Many of us have had to deal with loss in a myriad of ways. We have had to endure the disaster. Many are traumatised.

I wanted to say "It's a new day". The groaning and crying lasts for the night; but joy comes in the morning.

The nine geese

Early in the pandemic I painted a picture of nine geese flying over the sea, against a backdrop of a great big sky. It was inspired by a poem from Sheridan Voysey called the *Breath Prayer*, which encourages people to breathe in the fruits of the Spirit, and breathe out the opposite.

The wild goose is the ancient Celtic symbol of the Holy Spirit. I wanted to capture the gifts of the Spirit for us in this time. I believe that in the lockdown many of us came 'face to face' with ourselves. For some of us this time became an enforced sabbatical and it was in that place we may have seen within ourselves things we didn't like. This simple painting was humbly guiding people to breathe in the fruit of the Spirit and exhale out the opposite.

The painting gave people permission to say "I'm not coping", and encouraged them to breathe out the fear, blame and impatience – and to breathe deeply the free good gifts from God.

I decided to give copies of the print away and offer it for free on social media. Amazingly I ended up giving away 2500 prints! If I'd written a blog on the theme I imagine I would have had a few hundred people read it at the most. But this painting had an impact I couldn't quite believe. And of course, through giving it away, people then came back to my website to purchase further prints and cards, which is always encouraging when you have bills to pay!

To view more of Chris's art, visit chrisduffettart.com



Chris Duffett has a wealth of experience in Chaplaincy, Theology, Culture and the Arts. Chris is a former president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and an author of four books, his latest a novel on the life of his hero Philip the evangelist. He is an evangelist and artist, and the original founder of The Light Project.

The Breath Prayer

By Sheridan Voysey

You pray the first line slowly breathing in
and the second line slowly breathing out

Lord God, fill me with your Holy Spirit.

I receive your love,
and release my insecurity
I receive your joy,
and release my unhappiness
I receive your peace,
and release my anxiety
I receive your patience,
and release my impulsiveness
I receive your kindness,
and release my indifference
I receive your goodness,
and release my ungodliness
I receive your faithfulness,
and release my disloyalty
I receive your gentleness,
and release my severity
I receive your self-control,
and release my self-indulgence

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