

Painting God's Message

I have many tools in my toolbox which I have ready to help me share about Jesus with my Muslim friends. One of them is a small tin of watercolour paints and a brush. Sitting with someone and taking out the tin and paper pouring a little water into a small jam jar draws people's attention. Or sitting on my own and painting often attracts attention – "Are you an artist?" they ask, and I can invite them to sit with me.



I started during Covid when I joined an online art group responding to Bible Verses. As part of that group there was the Global Creatives' Day where I heard Chris Duffett speak about painting pictures for people in pubs and clubs. He gave some hints about what to draw and how simple things can be quite effective. The thing that stuck with me was "carrot people" -a long triangle with a dot on the top. This has helped me frequently when I have had to paint people!

Although my art is not very good, I thought this was something I could do. The first time I tried I was sitting in a cafe practicing and a man came over and asked what I was doing. He looked at my picture and said, "It looks like my home country let me take a photo and send it to my daughter." I said to him "Before you send it, add a message – *God loves you and cares for you.*" He typed it into his phone and sent the message off – I've no idea where his daughter is. I felt God had confirmed that this was a thing he would bless if I stepped out and trusted him.



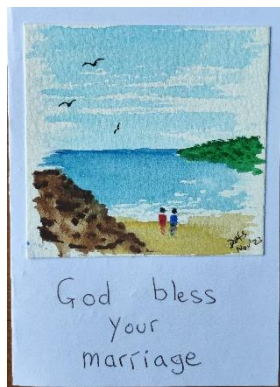
Sometimes I find talking about Jesus with people is quite confrontational, but a picture can introduce a topic quite subversively. I drew some sky and sand then went over to a chap and asked him about trees in his country. I'd already done some research into trees in Somalia so as he started to describe them, I drew a tree and painted some people sitting under the tree talking. This led me on to talk about the Kingdom of God being like a tree where people come into its shade and find rest and community – I left the picture with him with a challenge about joining God's kingdom.



Sometimes opportunities arise quite unexpectedly. I was drawing a tree which I had seen on a poster, a very simple tree in winter. A young guy looked across and said, "In our religion we aren't allowed to draw." We talked about why this was which led on to talking about God who has made us in his image and given us creative gifts. I continued painting the tree while I talked with him and then explained that a tree in winter reminds me of Hope. Although there are no leaves we have hope – a certain hope - that there will be leaves in the spring. I chatted with him about hope through knowing Jesus. I wrote something on the back about Hope and gave him the picture.

Telling stories is often a good way to introduce Jesus' teaching. I was talking with someone about our families and how important families are. I said I'd like to paint him a picture, so I told the story of Jesus and his mother and brothers. (Luke 8:19-21) Illustrating it as I talked. This gave the opportunity to challenge him to listen to Jesus' teaching. I wrote on the back that God wants us to join his family by listening to Jesus.

Luke 8:21 *Jesus replied, "My mother and my brothers are all those who hear God's word and obey it."*



Paintings also make good cards. I've made the size just smaller than A6 so an A5 card can be folded in half and I stick my painting on it giving it a nice border so making it into a card to give to someone. There is a guy I talk to a lot in an Islamic bookshop. He is quite polemic, but I persevere! One time, he hadn't been in the shop for a while and the people taking his place said he had got married. So, I painted a picture of two people on a beach (remembering to use Carrot People!) and made a card with *God Bless your Marriage* on it. When he got back, I took the card into the shop and as I gave it to him, I wrote a message of blessing inside it. I'm sure this has helped to soften our exchanges!

The pictures can have a long-term effect. The other day I was in a cafe which I visit at least once a week. As I was making my order, a man came up and said "I've still got the picture you painted for me". I had no idea who he was or what picture I had painted for him, however, I invited him to sit with me. Normally people don't take up that invitation but when he had got his coffee, he joined me at the table, and we had an amazingly deep conversation. I'm sure giving him the picture had prepared his heart.

Sometimes strange things happen as a result of paintings. I was sitting in a cafe and an elderly man came in. I invited him to sit with me and as we talked, I painted a picture of a bridge across a river. I talked with him about God and how God was like a bridge. And that he wants to carry us across difficult and dangerous times. I wrote on the back of the picture *God wants to carry you across difficult times*. The next time I saw him he came up to me "Thank you for your picture" he said reaching into his pocket. I thought he was going to show me the picture, but no he pulled out a scrap of card. He had torn off the words about God carrying you and had kept them in his wallet. Yes, often my pictures are not very good, but the words I share or write on the back are what is important.

Takeaways

- Simple can be effective. - People are touched by whatever you give them.
- Be on the lookout for simple pictures and compositions you can copy.
- Clip Art images on the internet can give helpful inspiration!
- Practice simple things that will carry a message – flowers, bridges, trees, roads, doors or gates
- Practice techniques so you can do a picture quickly – some people don't want to wait
- Do some research into topics – animals, trees, coastline or views of the countries where your friends come from.
- Have some basic pictures in mind – mountains, sea, hills and valleys, trees and roots or fruits.
- Write a verse or comment on the back and include the person's name.
- Add your contact details.
- I use 300gsm Cold Press NOT Rough Watercolour paper.