

Fr. Mark

Now I'd like to invite as our preacher today, a friend of mine from England, Rory Browne. He's come all the way from the UK. He's got a wonderful exhibition in the gallery that will open up afterwards. He's also a great Christian man who always has something good to say, so I've asked Rory to preach today. So, thank you, Rory for coming.

Rory Browne

Thank you very much, Mark. Thank you. I've met many of you over the last couple of days, you've been so welcoming. The La Jolla St. James community is a lovely, warm community. My wife and I have felt very welcome, so thank you very much and I hope to meet a few more of you after the service and over the next few days.

So, lovely passage that we got from Corinthians, which I think challenges us to see things in a different way. And one of the things that I as an artist and as a Christian am always challenged to do is to see things a little bit more in the context of God's light. And I paint a lot of light.

So, there's a lovely phrase, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." I was recently doing a presentation, a demonstration to 300 young people aged five to 11 years old, so a primary school in the UK. And I was describing my technique and painting a painting in front of them. And I was talking about the whole thing of happy accidents, how as a painter you can make marks that you don't intend, but then actually work for the good.

And at the end of my demonstration, the young people were asking questions about my technique and things, and then one little lad stuck his hand up and he said, "Mr. Browne, it's all very well you're talking about happy accidents, but I think that looks a right mess." And his name was Philip. I thought, what a wonderful, fresh, honest appraisal of how he saw my artwork. So, I thought, well, actually, that is about how we see things differently. Each of us will see different things in different works of art and different things in life.

I love the passage from Corinthians for the fact that it talks about light. In verse six it says, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." And in Psalm 36, it says, "In your light, we see light." And I think in many

ways the challenge for us is to see our lives through the prism of God's light in our lives.

It's not always easy to paint light. And forgive me, being an artist and also being offered the chance to talk to you this morning, I thought I'd have three paintings that would illuminate three points from the passage in Corinthians. So, forgive me if I divert into artist speak for a moment.

*[Raising a canvas painting for all to see]*



So, this painting here illustrates how I came to see and be able, I hope, to paint light. And there's a little story behind it. Painting light coming through trees is a tricky thing for an artist because the mind tells you what it is: It's the sun coming through trees. But painting it is quite a challenging process. And I learned from a student of mine. I've been a high school teacher teaching art for 32 years. I just finished last July, and I was watching a very talented artist student of mine painting upside down with a photograph upside down. And I said to Emily, I said, "Emily, why are you painting upside down?" And she said, "Well, I can just see shapes clearer. I can see colors clearer when it's upside down and my mind isn't thinking about what's there." I thought that's a good idea. So, she was 18 years old. I'm a lot older than her and I thought I can learn from her.

So, this was about six or seven years ago, I started turning photographs that I was working from in my studio upside down. And then I saw this *[pointing to the painting]*, that where you see light coming through trees, you get this phenomenon with color and shape

whereby the trees go from black to gray to amber then disappear, and then they go from amber to gray to black. And I painted that, and suddenly you've got the illusion of light coming through trees. And I thought that's a great metaphor for the way in which we need to perhaps see our lives through the prism of God's light in our lives. So that's a little illustration perhaps of how we might actually challenge ourselves to see life through God's prism.

I'm very aware that not always are our lives filled with light. And in fact, I think most of you will have encountered struggles and challenges in your lives. And I'm guessing that in this congregation here, people have gone through a lot of stuff, maybe loss, grief, maybe mental health issues, anxiety, finances, broken relationships. Life is a challenge, and my wife and I know that as much as anybody here. We've had challenges with various people, losses recently, and life is not always filled with light.

*[Raising another painting]*



This painting here is very much about that. Our son, who's now 30, went through a very tough time during COVID and struggled from a lot of issues in terms of his anxiety and his view of life. And one of the things he used to do was get up at dawn and walk our two dogs along the river near where we live in the UK. And this painting is a metaphor in a way for the struggles and the challenges that all of us probably face symbolically, of this painting is the sort of dark, brooding foliage, *[pointing]* and then also down here, you won't be able

to see it at the back, is a broken fence post, which is an analogy of the fact that not everything in our lives is fixed, that often they're broken and that we need help in fixing them.

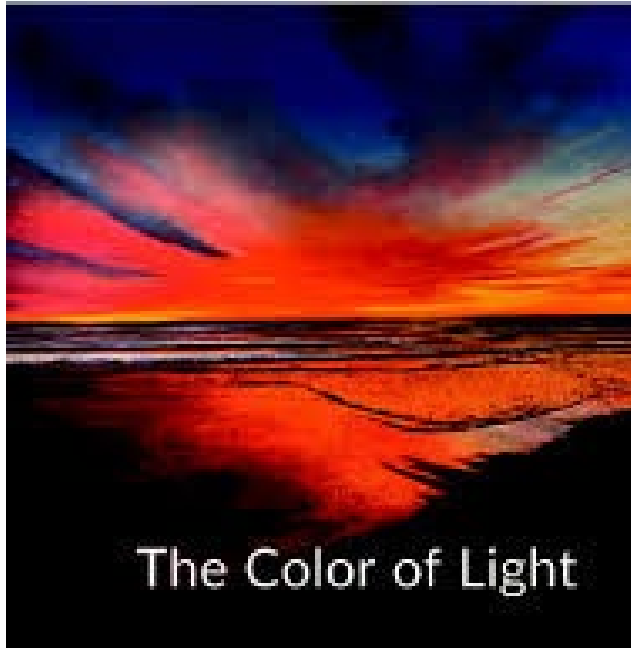
But what I tried to paint in this scene, and it was a photograph that my son took, is the hope of the light in the distance, and that is the great thing as Christians: We can trust that God has this plan for us, that God has an intent for us, and that if we try to see our lives through the prism of His light, then we're on surer footing than we might otherwise be.

I love the fact that in the Corinthians passage, part of which was read this morning, it's very clear that God understands what we go through. In verse eight it says this: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." And then in verse 17, it says, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." I just think that we probably this morning, wherever we were at, whether we're thriving or struggling, need to know that God is very deeply invested in where we're at, and He wants us to see our lives through the prism of his light.

Somebody when I first became a Christian told me that we should see everything in the context of eternity. And he described it as this, that if eternity is the moon, our lives on this planet, the 80 or 90 years that we have hopefully, are the size of a thumb compared to the distance from us to the moon. So, our lives are tiny in comparison to the eternity that God promises. Verse 18: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

I think it's encouraging for us to see our lives in the perspective of God's light, but also in the perspective of eternity.

Just want to conclude by just sharing another little painting that I hope illustrates something of where God wants us to place our trust and hope.



struggling, God knows, God cares, and he wants to be with you as you go through that journey.

How do we see God's light in our lives and life through the prism of God? It's very simple. I find myself as a Christian that the more I read God's word and saturate myself with that, the more I read it, the more I'm able to see life through God's light. And that's a daily challenge to me. And also honesty in prayer to Him. Wherever we're at, if we can be honest in prayer and faithful in prayer, we're likely to see God's light in our lives and life through the prism of His light. So, I'd just encourage you three things to finish with: just wherever you're at, know that God cares; try to see life through the prism of his light; and embed yourself in His word and be honest in your talking and prayer with Him. Thank you for listening.

And those two scenes were of the UK, this one is of your very own dear La Jolla Shores. And I'll leave these up at the front so you can have a look at these later. and the gallery will be open. But this one is very much about the hope of light in the distance. And I love colors, the abstract colors. The sunsets you get here are surely God's canvas. And how amazing that you've got this color, this saturation, these abstract shapes and forms. If anything speaks of the reality of God, it's your sunsets out there, not maybe in the June gloom, but in the fall clarity.

Now, within this painting, you've got the light in the distance, but what you won't be able to see even at the front is that in the shadows here, are a set of footprints. Now, most of you all know the allegorical poem of Footprints in the Sand where a man is with the Lord. He's passed away and he's looking back on his life, and forgive me if I reappraise it very briefly, and he's looking back over the items and the issues and the journey through life. and in the tough times, he sees one set of footprints, not two. So, he says to the Lord, "Where were you in those tough times? Where were you when I went through those moments of grief and loss and anxiety and issues?" And Jesus says, "My Son, that's when I carried you. That's my set of footprints." And I think I want to finish in a moment just to say that wherever you're at, whether you're thriving or