

Today I remember my friend, plucked from our midst by motor neurone disease. Such a nice man, such a good friend. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends.

So today, I think of beauty, and that's why this painting exists. The flower is an *Iris sibirica*, my favourite flower of all. I love its simple elegant beauty. For God made the plants, and made them beautiful, made it so that we could appreciate that beauty. And God said that it was good, and it was and it still is.

And God loved us, loves us, each one of us, without partiality, equally, and so today when the tears blur my vision, it is beauty that I paint. Beauty that speaks of love. For God so loved the world that Jesus came, not to condemn the world, but to save it. Beauty and love.

Christ was before everything. Through Christ all things were made, things beautiful, things lovely, love. And Christ holds all things together, things beautiful, things lovely, love

For God is love, and because God is love, this universe is permeated by love. Because of disobedience, sin, darkness found its way into the beautiful creation. Because of that darkness, bad stuff happens to good people, but the darkness will never win, can never win, has never won. The darkness is but a temporary thing, of this age, and we are given the tools to deal with it. Beauty, Love, Friendship, and if we ask, the Holy Spirit, God within.

So we see beauty, so much beauty, natural beauty and beauty created by people. Beauty speaks of love.

As well as beauty, we experience love, the love of friends, the love of family, the love of neighbours.

And in our lives, sometimes long, sometimes short, so much love, so much beauty. The darkness tries to get in, but the light won't let it in, won't let it win.

It hurts for those of us left behind when God calls one of us home, but for that one there is peace, and the love of God.

And that my friends is why I paint the pictures and write the words that go with them. Because God does love. And the darkness will never win. Friendship is an expression of love. Love is beautiful. So my painting is beautiful, the joyful creativity of God's beautiful universe, all driven by love.

And I am grateful to have known my friend, grateful to have experienced his friendship. His friendship has enriched my life. And because I really didn't have much time to get to know my friend I do know that his family and close friends will be feeling much more bereft, will be missing his cheerful stoicism much more intensely. They will be in my thoughts and prayers, doubtless will also be in the thoughts and prayers of the fifty plus people who receive these round robin emails.

Thank you for being part of my life, every one of you. Love from Rick

I read quite a lot today while I was thinking about this painting and about what to write. Normally I only quote a very few verses, although I have often looked at far more. Today I quote a few verses to do with creation and beauty, and then two chapters, the two chapters that helped me most as I thought about Love and Friendship; John 14 and 1 Corinthians 13. I hope that you will find them as helpful as I have as you think about beauty, love and friendship. If you want to read more, there are some more suggestions at the end.

Creation and beauty, love and life: Genesis 1:11-12; John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:17.

Love and friendship: John 14 all; 1 Corinthians 13 all.

More about the extent of God's love for us: John 3:16-17; Romans 8:31-39; Ephesians 3:16-20; 1 John 3:16-23, 4:7-21