

'Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities'

Isaiah 45: 1-6

Mark 10: 35-45

In any relationship, roles & responsibilities are present: created perhaps by professional chains of command, by interest & ability, by our unique gifts and personality traits; by physical ability; by laws or social structure. We can debate them, analyse them, like or dislike them, but they exist & we exist in them: we perform our roles as best we can & improve things as best we can: sometimes we even witness role reversals: people stepping into a need & succeeding. Is this news to anyone? This could have been read by the ever-present travel commercial's 'Captain Obvious'.

& each of these relationships involve two or more sides: sides which are inter-dependent: whether we choose to acknowledge this fact or not: no one is truly independent or 'self-made'.

The 17th century English poet & Church of England cleric John Donne stated: (before political correctness had been invented) 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent; any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind'.

Another fact of relationship life is that roles & responsibilities need to be worked on, tweaked & clarified: because daily life becomes magnified: what we are focussing on right now, becomes the whole thing: a great thing for church; memories can become short; what's important falls further away amid the clutter: the big picture becomes distorted, even meaningless, in the midst of day to day challenges. Such is life: such was life, since time literally began.

The Bible is literally full of stories of God's people forgetting who they were/where they came from, falling away from God's ways & laws, becoming more 'earthly' than 'heavenly': & God finding multiple ways to remind His creation: I love you, you are special, I am always with you; I haven't forgotten you or left you, or written you off: **you can't have a creation without part of the creator in it**: God came here Himself: to be closer to His creation: us; to whisper constantly in our ears; to wait at our door; to tap us on the shoulder.

'In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, **& the Word was God**'. >Oh no, he's starting there: we'll be here all day! No. But we need to start here because without this made clear, the rest won't ever be either: we sing: 'Thy **Word** is a lamp unto my feet': well here it is: from day one: & nothing has changed, except for us, for better or worse: here, is our **creator**; the very essence

of love & care who invites us always to have faith in him. God never ceases to reach out to us. Consider, for a moment all the things/meals/events that you have made/prepared in love for someone else: a meal, a craft project, a surprise outing, a vacation or special event...: how you felt as you were preparing them with such care & attention to detail: preparing them out of love. Those feelings are from God: who created us the same way: in His image: in those moments, we are 'doing likewise'.

In some versions of the Bible, the passage before the one we read today is called: 'Pleading with unfaithful Israel' & 'Judah will be restored': verse 28 says: 'who says of Cyrus, he is my servant?' >(Cyrus trivia): Good question, because God chose Cyrus (the Great) as His instrument for His restoration plan for Judah: a nation who had lost sight of the big picture & their identity & dependence on God: one commentary states: 'Though not a worshipper of the Lord, the Persian (Iran) monarch played an unusual role as Israel's shepherd and God's anointed judge on nations'. He was the patron & deliverer of Israel: Judah had slipped away: but God hadn't: He didn't abandon them or write them off, instead God, as He has done many times found/appointed/anointed another: an 'outsider' to a saving, divine mission. Even though he was not a worshipper: God was not abandoning Israel (in spite of their drifting & forgetting), nor was He supporting Cyrus for the glory of Cyrus or as an end in itself: an important point, lest people who are called to a job or mission, let it go to their head: God's plan & ways were and are perfect & worthy of our trust & faith: **God will go to whatever lengths are necessary to reach & bring back His people**, & so-called outsiders are frequently brought into this clarification of roles & responsibilities: this is any & all of us. Does this remind us (as an Easter people) of our 'outsider': Jesus: born, not in a usual place, hanging out with unusual people, & saying unusual, controversial things & being a role clarifier, over and over again: like in Mark 10: 35-45: It starts with two of his followers: James & John & then spreads to the rest of them: it always amazes me & makes me think, when those who spent 24-7 with Jesus: watching, listening, learning, still didn't get it; still seemed to spend more of their days as representatives of this world, than of Jesus' world: trying to make the big picture of the gospel fit into earthly frameworks & organizational structures. And they start by sounding like some of our own children have sounded from time to time: 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask'. Sadly, we go here too, from time to time & treat God like some prayer vending machine: prayers in, instant results out: like a can of Coke or a bag of chips: & become confused & frustrated when the result doesn't pop out right away. Here

it comes: Jesus says: 'what do you want me to do?' 'Grant us that we may sit, one on your right hand & the other on your left, in your glory'. I will give them some credit here: their request is relating to heaven: they are thinking outside the box: but they are asking for an earthy concept: a heavenly organizational chart: they didn't get that they should have been requesting a heavenly concept for earthly living & not the other way around. They didn't realize or acknowledge what it would take to 'get to glory'. Jesus answer: his clarification of roles: 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink & be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They were able: Jesus journey & crucifixion would ultimately affect them too: make them live in fear & put them in danger, as well: & they did become effective messengers. But what they were asking was not for Jesus to give: it wasn't His role or responsibility. Then the others 'became displeased with James & John': 'the gang mentality'; the 'holier than thou' thing: how much have groups really changed? but Jesus gathered the disagreeing group, where anger was starting & reminded them that the rules and roles were to be different for them; they were not to follow after authoritarian, earthly hierarchies: power & fame for the sake of power & fame: they were to be servants: no one greater than the other; each serving according to his gifts; and being willing to risk losing all of earthly living's so-called treasures, if called upon to do so & knowing that that would still be ok in the grand scheme of God's will. For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to give His life a ransom for many. Meeting people where they are; empathizing with their situations and concerns; being active listeners and solution facilitators in an increasingly impersonal world; getting our hands dirty. Somewhere out there, & you may already know who it is, is someone who needs our individual servanthood: we need to be alert & open to finding them & doing more for them.

God is with us in this, His plan: to redeem His people & provide servants for each other: since we are His loving creation, He is always with us & ready to advise & assist: not necessarily to do, for we have a role as well: sometimes miracles happen, sometimes God provides the lifeboat, which we have to row to shore. We will clarify all this, only by spending time with Christ & practicing/internalizing His ways, within our close-up, daily world. God is always here: like picking up a telephone & hearing the dial tone: prayer is the lifted receiver: the dial tone & perhaps communication & understanding are like our creator: pick up the prayer phone & listen. What saving/serving mission has God chosen/could God choose for you & me?

Amen.