



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

2nd June, 2023

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.
Isaiah 43:1b

Spurgeon's College motto, set in stained glass in its entrance hall is: "ET TENEO ET TENEOR", which roughly translates as "I both hold and am held". It's a lovely concept, not just for ministers but for all of us in the family of God. We are held by God and in the embrace of his people, the Christian community (the church), and, as part of that kingdom and family, we hold.

Catholic teacher Fr. Richard Rohr writes: *"That which owns me is greater than that which I own."* The idea of being owned or possessed or held by God is powerful, its implications are deep! Our Father God says through Isaiah, *"I have redeemed you (bought you back).... you are mine."* Paul - in the light of Christ the Redeemer- writes, *"You are not your own; you were bought at a price."* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). And the Old Testament prophet Malachi puts it with poetic beauty (best in the Authorised Version!), *"they (God's people) shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels"* (3:17; -It reminds me of the old hymn, *"When He cometh, when He cometh to take up his jewels..."*)

The need to belong, the sense of belonging, of being owned, *held* in love by another being - human or divine- is a very deep one in the human heart; and the God who created us with that need is the one who also meets it, saying simply, not controllingly but lovingly, *"You are mine"*.

So what of the other side? *I hold as well as being held*. It must be the height of human joy and fulfilment to 'hold' another human being in love, not just in marriage ("to have and to hold") but in friendship, professional roles, parenting, in love, in and beyond a church family. But such holding, such 'owning' of another person, is a delicate matter, both a privilege and a responsibility. It can -as history and the news show- be controlling, abusive, exploitative, in everything from despotic leaders to religious cults, and behind-closed-doors relationships.

Thank God that he who owns me has a greater and more loving grasp (John 10:29) than ever I can -or should- have over another; but for him to share with me the image-of-God desire and capacity to lovingly 'own' others is a gift to accept and express in *his* way to *his* glory... and enjoy, in friendship, in family, in church, at work, or wherever.

And that's before we start on the God-given call to hold non-human things, like truth, integrity and Godly conduct. *"Hold on to that which is good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21), *"...hold firmly to the word of life"* (Philippians 2:16), *"...hold(ing) onto faith and a good conscience"* (1 Timothy 1:19), -and more (2 Thessalonians 2:15, Revelation 2:25, 3:11, etc.).

And one last thing: let's think of 'our' possessions, -home, car, necessities, luxuries... 'stuff', and go back to Richard Rohr: *"That which owns me is greater than that which I own."* What a good thing that is; but getting it the wrong way round is spiritually harmful.