19th June 2023

Shaped

"A lovely being, scarcely formed or moulded,
A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded."

Lord Byron, *Don Juan*

When I used "master designer" in my "Prayer for Today" a while ago, my mind returned to a "master" image in another prayer. It comes from the history of the Iona Community, and was penned by George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, several decades ago. Over many years of personal and public usage, this prayer has lost none of its impact for me.

O Christ, the Master Carpenter, who at the last, through wood and nails, purchased our whole salvation, wield well your tools in the workshop of your world, so that we, who come rough-hewn to your bench, may here be fashioned to a truer beauty of your hand. We ask it for your own Name's sake. Amen

There are many who will say that they are fashioned, shaped, formed or moulded by this Christ, their "Master Carpenter". There are many who have no such belief, or who would not turn to such imagery to describe what shapes their lives. But I want to go beyond that kind of tension, and reflect on the importance of acknowledging that we *are* all shaped in life, in one way or another; to give thanks for what fashions us into a "truer beauty"; and, if we have an influence on the shape of the lives of others, to ensure we give ourselves to that task to the best of our ability.

Today, I invite you to ponder what has shaped you: parents, or others from past generations; teachers who stand out from the crowd; heroes whose lives you seek to emulate; figures from history, whose achievements have altered your perspective; friends, soulmates, lovers, siblings, clergy, the list is endless. And when you've come to the end of your list, pause again, and you'll find you add even more. And now … be thankful. Simply that, give thanks for the people who've shaped you, and shape you even now, into the truer beauty of what you are meant to be.

And then … think for a moment of that "rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded", that child or adult, family member or work responsibility, casual acquaintance or life-long friend, whose life you can shape, those "rough-hewn" characters who land on your bench. What can you do, and what are you doing now, to shape *them* to a truer beauty?

A prayer for today

Shape me, Lord, into the beauty you require; fashion me into what I'm meant to be. Amen

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