

All the world's a stage

Judith and I enjoy tracing words in the English language back to their original usage and meaning. Recently, we looked at 'roll', nowadays spelt 'role' in the meaning we are concerned with here. In the 16th century there occurred, especially in London, the beginning of dramatic theatre, famously Shakespeare's plays but he had his rivals. It quickly became popular and lucrative and companies of actors competed with each other to attract audiences. Playwrights were much in demand.

The business was not regulated and those plays which proved popular, were pirated and produced at different venues by different companies. The author of the original script would then be paid only for "the first night". After that, it was common property and free for any producer to put on his own version, as he remembered it, performed by his own company of actors.

In an effort to obstruct this "piracy", producer and actors worked with just one copy of the play, which was written on a "roll". An actor was given the script of the part, or parts, he was playing. This was cut out of the original and put together to form a separate "roll" for the actor to whom the parts had been allocated. Only in rehearsal would he discover how his roll fitted with the other rolls to make the complete story. There is a scene in Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" in which the actors are given their rolls in this way.

We moved on to think about the rolls/roles we all play in our lives: some we choose; many we stumble upon; many, even most, are foisted on us because of choices we made earlier; or through pure chance. Looking back on my life, I see no evidence that God has had a hand in casting me in any of the many roles I've played out. One was bus conductor for Western National Bus Company. I recall an early morning shift on the 142, which was a double decker. Neither the driver nor I were familiar with its designated route and so we explored the lanes of South Devon looking for it or a passenger who was familiar with it. The only indication of God's intervention is that we encountered no "low bridge". We did not find a passenger or the route. For most of us, it is not the roles we find ourselves taking which define our lives as Christians, but the way we approach these roles.

The Christmas story is at the heart of the Christian message that our God loves His creation and sent His son into the world to show us the best way to live. Ours is a loving God Who makes no demands on us. This leaves us free to follow our natural instinct to love each other and we know that, when we are loving, we feel good about ourselves and this makes us happy. So, in this season, as we celebrate God's love for us and our love for each other, may we rejoice in whatever rolls we have been given and accepted and play out these roles with joy and gratitude that we are loved and loving.

Robert Lock

Does God make no demands on us? Certainly, those who respond to that love feel that, in the view of the hymn writer Isaac Watts, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all." Letters to 'Crosstalk', please, Editor.

