

My Somerset Life

A diary by Brian Snellgrove

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They also serve who only stand and wait

Once again, Pepys is very loquacious almost to the point of being laborious so if you want to read the full diary entry please click on the date below. I have included a excerpt on which I wish to base today's thoughts.

Tuesday 31 May 1664

...Dined at home, and so to the office, where a great while alone in my office, nobody near, with Bagwell's wife of Deptford, but the woman seems so modest that I durst not offer any courtship to her, though I had it in my mind when I brought her in to me. But I am resolved to do her husband a courtesy, for I think he is a man that deserves very well...

Comment: so, another side of Pepys, almost lechery. He decides not to make a sexual – or now we would say inappropriate – advance to the wife of his friend out of respect for the husband. I would say rather sarcastically, that's decent of him and considerate to his wife.

The discourse of the town is only whether a warr with Holland or no, and we are preparing for it all we can, which is but little.



John Milton, Born 9 December 1608, Cheapside, City of London. Died 8 November 1674

John Milton (d. 1674) was a contemporary of Pepys born a stone's throw from him. Most scholars believe the sonnet below was composed sometime between June and October 1655 when Milton's blindness was essentially complete.

I have looked carefully at all images of Milton and there is no image which shows him as obviously blind. He may have suffered from macular degeneration which means that although you can see peripherally, you cannot see detail ahead of you.

*When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need*

*Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."*

It is up to each of my readers to reflect on this incredibly profound piece and I'm sure many books have been written including the subject. It is clear that Milton is reminding us about the doers versus the people who just learn to be. His idea is that God is measuring us by standards other than the ability to perform tasks.



I'm reminded of the many occasions in my life about which I can do nothing. A more obvious political one is the amount of deliberate evil, greed, and general wickedness in this world which we have to watch like spectators at a football game where the players have been bribed and the match has been fixed. We can only boo and scream.

There are other occasions however where at a more local personal level, our input is important and significant. We are waiting for our child to make a decision about whether to go to university. We are waiting for our friend to end an inappropriate relationship when everyone else can see that it has no chance whatsoever of succeeding. So we are indeed standing and waiting but we are also serving. Why? Because by being available and willing to talk, indeed by just existing in open mode, we are performing a service.

A very crude analogy is the act of insuring our car with a company. The company does not 'do' anything but you know that if you have an accident you can get the help and support you need. All the company is doing is being itself. It's the same with us supporting our friends and family. If you are approachable you just wait for the call or visit knowing that the person knows you are open. . if you do not receive contact then it is because the person does not wish to speak to you at the moment. The fact that they do not wish to speak is none of your business. Efforts

to push them one way or the other may have a countervailing effect.



My advice (given without any expectation that people will take it) is to commit this person to the universe, the person that you are worried about. Turn your mind to

other things. It is their lesson to learn, their destiny, not your destiny and not your lesson. You do not know what is going on in the mind of the sufferer. You ARE serving by standing and waiting.

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