

Weekly Encouragement

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They Also Serve

By Rev. Peter Eng

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"Don't you know I have to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)

John was a brilliant young man passionate about God and his Christian tradition. He firmly believed that the British monarchy was wrong and supported the alternative. For a brief period, England was a Commonwealth, and John luxuriated in its freedom. John invested himself in the cause of Cromwell, (which included some disastrous decisions), and upon Cromwell's success, he was made the Secretary of Foreign Tongues. In that capacity he executed the foreign language correspondences. Then, there arose a Dutch who argued for

the monarchy, and John felt obliged to respond.

The personal challenge John faced was that he was going blind. He had given himself to excessive reading and had weak eyesight. His doctors warned him not to subject his eyes to excessive strain, but this challenge from a Dutchman against the virtue of the commonwealth was a matter of principle and conviction. John wrote an effective response, but his eyesight gave out.

Blindness was debilitating to anyone. But to a man of letters, it would suggest the end of his usefulness. Soon after, Cromwell died of malaria and the Stuarts regained the throne of England. John was spared by Charles II, the new king, but his eyesight and life had been spent on a failed political cause.

Yet John's faith in God as sovereign remained steadfast. John wrote a short but powerful poem "On his Blindness," reminding his audience, and perhaps himself, that "They also serve who only stand and wait." Shortly thereafter, he wrote his masterpiece "Paradise Lost." John's political disappointment, his personal

blindness, and his own misfortune in life combined with his strong Christian faith to produce the powerful images in Paradise Lost. Later in life, things took a turn for the better. John Milton wrote his sequel Paradise Regained, nicely rounding off Paradise lost. But Paradise Lost remains his masterpiece. It was forged and tempered in the fires of his personal hell.

When there was nothing to do but wait, John Milton produced his best work. His emotional repose was a resigned patience, declaring "they also serve who only stand and wait." He wrote poetry waiting for a political comeback. But his poetry was to be his lifework.

We don't know much about the years Jesus spent as a carpenter in Nazareth. Luke gives us a glimpse in [Luke 2](#). When Jesus attained the religiously defined adulthood at age twelve, his most natural place would be in the Jerusalem temple fulfilling his calling. "Don't you know I have to be in my Father's house?" he replied, when Mary said they had been searching all over for him. But his time had not yet come. So he returned to Nazareth and spent almost 20 years as a carpenter. Jesus was ready to serve at twelve, but did not do so till he was 30. Those were waiting years. Obedience to his parents was not disobedience to God. Waiting is also serving. Despite his irreplaceable ministry to die for our sins, Jesus waited for God's timing to serve him. When I want to serve him better but find no opportunity I am

reminded of Jesus' wait to serve God. I cannot understand God's inscrutable plan and grow impatient.

...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."
(John Milton)

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.