

13<sup>th</sup> January 2023

## Still

**“Let the long contention cease!  
Geese are swans, and swans are geese.  
Let them have it how they will!  
Thou art tired; best be still.”**

Matthew Arnold, *The Last Word*

Hanging in my kitchen is a painting by the Scottish artist, Gillian Goodheir. It's a “still life” of lots of fruit, in bowls and scattered on a table, topped off by a little vase of vibrant pansies. I've often found myself getting lost in this lovely “still life”, and finding new things to see, admire and ponder. This “still life” is designed to capture a scene in a moment in time, yet it is never completely still for me, because of the thoughts it evokes.

In the troubled times of our lives – decisions to be made; traumas to be coped with; changes to be accommodated; fears to be overcome – we need to find time to be still. When we have to deal with another “long contention”, as Matthew Arnold describes it, and arguments rage around us about whether geese are swans or swans are geese, black is white or white is black, decisions are right or plans are wrong, we can get upset and confused. All the more reason to take a moment, or several moments, to be still, to find that calm centre where you can have a glimpse of peace.

“Let them have it how they will” for a little while. You'll return to those debates about swans and geese soon enough. But for now, take some “me time”, some much-needed me time, to compose yourself into a still-life. If “thou art tired” then “best be still” is absolutely right.

Amazingly, in that still place, you're not giving up on things, avoiding the struggles, hiding from the rigours of life. For, like Gillian Goodheir's painting in my kitchen, *your* still-life is never completely still, for your heart, and mind, your soul, your inner-being, are being formed into newness even in that moment of stillness. It's remarkable, really. There will always be some insight, some creative thought, some concept of blessing, that will be yours to enliven and restore you. Your still-life will never be absolutely still – not should it be under the blessing of God.

Matthew Arnold calls this “The Last Word”. But it's become “the first word” for me. “Be still, and know ...”

### **A prayer for today**

*So now I am still, I am waiting to know ... and waiting ... till stillness does its job. Amen*

*An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon*

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