



The Dance

SWEET INTIMACIES

"I have been crucified
with Christ; and it is no
longer I who live, but
Christ lives in me; and
the life which I now
live in the flesh I live by
faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave
Himself up for me."

(Galatians 2:20)

THERE IS A HUMAN LONGING sweet in itself—sufficient in itself to overshadow the object of its desire. There is a longing that can be superior to that for which it longs. But the intense longing that we experience in anticipation of the Lord must be satisfied by the object of its desire. The longing is sweet; it energizes our desire for actual contact. But if that contact never comes, we disrupt the flow of holy communion for which we have been designed.

Before we know the Lord, the distant echo from our empty God-space coaxes us only toward the longing—but the longing is childish, unformed, erratic. We pursue the frivolous, the fad, the inane—things as vacuous as the space we hope they will fill. They satisfy, at best, only for a while, and, at worst, distract us from the truth shaped perfectly to fill our cavernous longing.

Once we discover that truth—once Christ is in residence, filling the vacancy

left for Him—the longing becomes only a pleasant prelude to the more substantial experience of actually living with Him.

A Paralyzing Fear

The very idea of being baptized caused in me an almost paralyzing fear. At the tender age of eight I had accepted Christ; now nine years old, and on the list of those to be baptized the following Sunday evening, I was petrified at the prospect.

The baptismal in the old Baptist Temple of Marshalltown, Iowa, was a massive oak-paneled affair—rounded and jutting out into the congregation. None of this high and lofty, perched above the choir loft business; no, this one was right down there by the first row, next to the piano. It was huge—especially to a nine-year-old. A broad body of water in which one practically had to swim to reach the pastor. And there was the rub.

I couldn't swim. I wouldn't even put my head under water. *Oh Lord, why couldn't I have been born Episcopalian?!*

The instructions had been to wear a white shirt and bring a white handkerchief—which would be placed over the nose at the crucial moment. I searched out the widest, fattest white handkerchief I could lay my hands on. I rehearsed the moment, running it over and over in my head: Let's see, I fold my arms across my chest. Pastor will grab my wrist. With my other hand I forcefully wrap this wad of cotton over my nose, hermetically sealing it against the remotest possibility of one drop of water getting in.

I was certain I would drown. I was certain the pastor would haul me up out of the water sputtering and gasping and I would be publicly humiliated before the entire congregation—including my *other* heart's desire: my little girlfriend, seated just a few feet away on that front pew. Talk about being persecuted for your faith!

I stepped into those waters with fear and trepidation... up the few wooden steps, down into the water, turn the corner and part the heavy curtain—*everybody's staring at me!*—reach for the pastor's arm before I slip and fall helplessly beneath the waves. He asks me a question, to which I answer in the affirmative. Do I have a verse I would like to recite? *I think so; I mean, I did just a minute ago.*

My mind is a blur, hopelessly focused on the burning question: Will I survive this ordeal? Suddenly the Trinity is being

pronounced, the pastor's hand is up over my head—I'm sinking, I'm sinking! Quick, the handkerchief! I squeeze my eyes closed; I shove the folded cloth against my face, praying I haven't left a tiny portal for water to seep through and do me in.

Before my life can pass before me in this watery grave, I'm up and out. My

*A wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord,
A wonderful Saviour to me;
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock,
Where rivers of pleasure I see.*

*A wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord,
He taketh my burden away;
He holdeth me up, and I shall not be moved,
He giveth me strength as my day.*

*With numberless blessings each moment He crowns,
And, filled with His fullness divine,
I sing in my rapture, oh, glory to God
For such a Redeemer as mine!*

*When clothed in His brightness, transported I rise
To meet Him in clouds of the sky,
His perfect salvation, His wonderful love,
I'll shout with the millions on high.*

*He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock
That shadows a dry, thirsty land;
He hideth my life in the depths of His love,
And covers me there with His hand,
And covers me there with His hand.*

(Fanny J. Crosby)

mom is dabbing at her eyes, my dad is beaming, and my girlfriend is grinning at me. Praise be! I haven't humiliated myself after all.

The Exquisite Intimacy of First Contact

When I came up out of that baptismal pool, there was only rejoicing.

All memory of the procedural agonies was gone; any discomfort or embarrassment was forgotten. In a moment, rapture replaced dread. In a moment, I felt cleaner than I had ever felt after the longest bath. Suddenly I understood: Though my sins were forgiven when I had accepted Christ as my Savior, I had just experienced (and demonstrated) in a tangible way that all of my sins had now been thoroughly washed away. To those who had witnessed the moment, I was now a new person. With Jesus, my Savior, I had passed through the waters of His baptism into a new life.

Most believers could tell a similar story from the earliest moments of their walk with Christ. Those early days are energized by a pristine excitement not unlike the earliest days with our mate. And as it is with two lovers who have invested themselves fully in each other's lives, the sweet and powerful intimacies of first contact need never leave our steady communion with the Lord. Oh, in time they may, but if they do, it will be *our* doing, for Jesus never tires of spending time with us. He never becomes bored with the process of investing more of His life into ours.

Once we move past the longing, to make contact with Him, the Dance truly begins. Once we entrust ourselves to His arms, Christ then becomes, for the first time in our lives, truly Lord.