



old devotion

Which is better—the fresh, tingling exuberance of new love, or the comfortable warmth of old devotion?

“Alas,” says one, “I do not feel as I once did.” Well, dear friend, it may be that you make some mistake in reference to your own experience. When the passion of love was first lighted in the breast, there was, as it were, a blaze of the match, the paper, and the wood, although the coals had not yet ignited. Yours was then the flush of joy, but not the vehement heat. Now your heart is all on fire like a solid ruby. There is much more heat, though there is less blaze.

C.H. Spurgeon

AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY-EIGHT, Mom tends to nod off from time to time while we are reading to her. Age, fading eyesight, and the daily dose of narcotics she takes for pain is a combination sufficient to render her drowsy by the second or third paragraph. Whenever her eyes close and her chin lowers to her chest, we pause in our reading and wait. Shortly she will open her eyes, lift up her head, and claim she wasn’t asleep, but just resting her eyes.

Uh huh.

Some times, however, this is borne out. The other day her eyes were closed and her head beginning to descend when we read a passage in the story that included a familiar Scripture passage. I would have sworn that she was asleep, but the words of the verse caused a faint smile to pass across her face, and I could almost see her reciting the old, familiar words to herself.

An old friend had just nudged her in that twilight between wakefulness and slumber, and brought a smile to her face.

Some of us are not too old to remember what it was like to be newly in love. We can remember that catch in the throat, the ecstatic charge from the simple affection of holding hands, the dew-drop sweetness of a first kiss, the sleepless imaginings when apart.

At the same time, some of us are sufficiently old to be able to compare those blissful awakenings of new love to the less ecstatic—yet more substantive, more profound—older love we have now. And, on most days, even though we recall that early love with fondness, we would not voluntarily exchange what we have now for it.

Brand new faith is a fresh tonic to the family of God. The new Christian may stumble over the words of his prayers, but they are authentic words. He has not yet learned the cobwebbed vernacular of the church, so there is an exuberant, unsophisticated vitality to his words. His understanding is, admittedly, fragile; his knowledge of God and His word is unformed. He is, in his faith,

like a small child that has not yet received instruction. Even so, his relationship with Christ is new and unsullied, as yet untested, without guile or hypocrisy, clean.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.

Ephesians 4:14-15

By comparison, though the “old” Christian’s faith may, at times, lapse into a too-familiar monotony, it is more often than not substantial, and deep. He has spent time with the Lord, and he knows Him well. God’s written word is not just a book of wisdom, but a comfortable companion, a guidebook, and friend. He may not know every word, but he knows the sound of God’s voice.

If new faith is to the church a breath of fresh air, old faith is the solid framework that holds it together.

Which is better? That depends on your perspective. But it is a safe bet that even though the venerables in the church can recall with fondness those exhilarating first days of new faith, they would not exchange what they have now for them.

Sitting there watching Mom respond to the familiar word of God, I realized what a precious gift she and Dad gave me. For from my earliest days I was inculcated with the things of God. Mom and Dad could not give me salvation, but they lovingly surrounded me with the nurturing environment of the church and God’s word, so that when the Spirit introduced me to Christ, accepting Him as my Savior was as natural to me as my next breath.

And even though I am considerably younger than Mom, I am old enough in the faith that when I hear a familiar passage read, or hear the words of an old gospel hymn, I too smile and nod my head, and recite the words to myself.

I still remember those exhilarating early days of faith. They were wonderful. They were priceless. But I would not exchange what I have now for any price at all.