10th August 2025

Ages

"Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come."

Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David Imitated (1741)*

According to Shakespeare's character, Jaques, in *As You Like It*, we have seven ages in our lives (I'll make this generic rather than using the gender-specific language of Shakespeare's day): infancy; schoolchild; teenager; young person; middle-aged; old age; dotage and death.

Being reminded of these, you may now be pondering what age you fall into, or which part of your life you wish you were able to live over again. Shakespeare's "seven ages" is a useful template., a workable framework. But don't the "ages" get a bit mixed up? What about irresponsible grown-ups, the with age and body of an adult, yet with the behaviour and attitudes of an infant? Anyone come to mind? And what about "middle-aged"? When does *that* begin, and when does it finish? Are there *really* definable boundaries between one age and another?

Today, however (as yet another birthday looms and because I've been involved with a lot of funerals recently) I'm pondering the final age of Shakespeare's analysis: dotage and death. I've touched on the death part a bit in recent days, and I'll almost certainly come back to it another time. But what about "dotage"? When we pass a certain age, do we give ourselves to decline, act old, stop doing things, retreat from society, feel we have no useful contribution to make anymore? Is there a defining line between when you're worth something and when you're not?

Of course there isn't! And with that assertion, I offer two thoughts. Firstly, if one of the marks of a civilised society is how we treat people "in their dotage" (however it's defined), how well are we doing that at present, and how well are we handling it within our own family circle, community, or friendships? And secondly, if "you're as old as you feel", can we continue to value the contributions we and others make in senior years, drawn from the wisdom, experience and insights of long and valued lives?

In the ages of life, let's not be hung up by any tidy analysis – Shakespeare's or anyone else's. But let's keep valuing people as they are, old, or young, or *any* age in between.

A prayer for today

From Alpha to Omega, you are our God. And my life is of value to you – right to the end.

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