

SERMON

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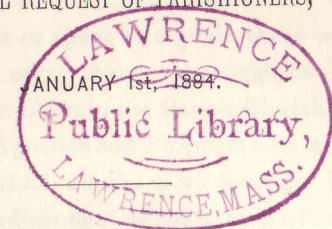
REV. WILLIAM LAWRENCE,

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"Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together, for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

THOUGHTS, suggestions and reminiscences rush in upon me so thick and fast, as I come to speak my last words as Rector to you, my dear people of Grace Church, that I hardly know how or where to begin.

There is no time or space to explain these words of the text: they carry their own suggestions in the reading. The Church, the Parish Church; its foundations, the Apostles and Prophets: its corner stone, that from which all the work springs, Jesus Christ: the nice adjustment of part to part: each separate piece of the work having its own office and beauty and strength; yet fitting perfectly into each and all of the others: the steady growth and

upbuilding: the Unity of Design, the Unity in one holy purpose, an holy temple, and yet in that Unity the individuality of every member, his own personal spiritual life, each man, woman and child an habitation of God through the spirit.

These great thoughts form the channel along which I should like to have my words run this morning.

I shall, near the close of this sermon, look back for one final word of reminiscence; but for the most part I want to turn your thoughts to the present and the future possibilities of this parish in this city. I shall repeat what you have often heard me say. For this is no time for new ideas, but for an open, honest, earnest talk upon what lies nearest to our hearts to-day—the welfare of this parish.

In the first place, we form a parish in the Protestant Episcopal Church: our fortunes are bound up in the fortunes of that body. I would then turn your thoughts first to that: what are its possibilities in this country and age, its fitness and its opportunities to preach Jesus Christ to the American people?

There is, as almost all observers of religious life and thought agree, a growing restlessness of the

people under the elaborate and comparatively modern creeds; creeds which hedge in the Christian profession by statements which few understand, and which, taken in their literal sense, few can subscribe to; many earnest, simple, Christian people find that these are burdens heavy, grievous to be borne, laid on their shoulders by well meaning but rather narrow interpreters and holders of the faith of a century or two past. There is the conviction that somehow the gospel is a simpler thing, that loyalty to Christ, love of the Father, dependence on the Holy Spirit do not demand these elaborate explanations and limitations. These people are looking about for a simpler creed, just as deep and true, but simpler and more scriptural. And they are, I believe, finding what they seek in a creed that has been recited centuries before these more modern creeds were thought of; in the Apostles creed as it stands in our prayer book; a statement of the facts and great truths of the gospel, positive, simple, straight-forward, such as can be understood by the humblest. Around it gather men of many shades of belief and opinion on the minor truths of the gospel, but they all agree on these strongly stated facts. It is this that, so far as

doctrine is concerned, is the test of membership in our church. And it is striking to see how surprised and delighted some persons are to find what they had long wanted and what they last expected to find in the Episcopal Church. Again, I believe that our people in these days are learning that as a rule character is formed by growth and gradual development. There are of course crises in all lives, times of marked changes, and there are exceptional lives of revolutionary changes; but I say that as a rule, character, whether for better or worse, changes gradually. Therefore it is a spiritual development by a religious education that must be the method.

It is neither common sense nor (as it seems to me) Christian to keep the children outside the Church, to let them feel that they have no part or place there until, having come of age, they are converted or think they are. But by bringing the child within the Church, by baptism making that child "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven," and by educating the child to realize his privileges and responsibilities in his church, he will be prompted to live more worthily of them. Thus "growing in

grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ," instructed in the simple, deep, practical truths of the catechism, the creed, the Lord's prayer and the ten commandments, his duty to God and neighbor, the meaning of Christ's ordinances, strengthened by daily religious culture, steadied by duty, inspired by the sense of his privileges, the character of that child develops into a larger spiritual life; it is healthy and strong, and in time the day comes when he, conscious of his own devotion to God and his Saviour, stands and takes upon himself all the privileges and responsibilities of a Christian and a member of Christ's Church. In all this I say there is a healthy tone, a freedom from petty rules, a practical method, a spiritual education, which is to-day finding a welcome in many quarters and which is appealing to the common sense of the people.

Again, there is in the spirit of the day a growing desire for more dignity in worship, a taste for a ritual; sometimes running to extremes and crude absurdities: still on the whole the people are feeling their way in that direction. There is little that is decided and positive in this restlessness: there is the strong healthy dread of formalism, and yet the

liking of some things now identified in their minds with formalism. This spirit is in the air, felt in all the churches about us. And so far as it finds expression, it is in the looking to our Church for their model. There are those of you here now who know how it is some such want that first brought you to this church, and how with months and years the spirit of the service, ay, the very words and phrases of the prayer book have become dearer and entwined in all your religious experiences, in your joys and sorrows, in your public worship and your private prayers.

Again, with all the varied denominations of Christians, the divisions and continual creations of new sects, there comes the yearning for some one church that has stood the test of centuries, that has not yielded to popular waves of the day, but has held to its own steady course and order and outlived many of the quick growing and fast dying bodies. Age, which in religious things, was a while ago an objection in the popular mind, is now with many a recommendation. That a church has insisted consistently on its creed, its ministry, its mode of worship is a sign that it has vitality and something permanent; no imitations answer the pur-

pose: it is the old work itself that is wanted. To our Church such a spirit turns; the Church has the flavor of age, the association with the past, it can trace its lineage back to the earliest days, has held firm through many a convulsion. There is something in all this that invites respect and confidence. And that respect and confidence in her is, I believe, on the increase; many who, ten and twenty years ago, looked upon the Episcopal Church as a respectable relic of a past age, dead to all intents and purposes, are now asking if there is not something in its age which invites attention. Still something else must stand behind all these traits to win the people.

Our Church's creed, her method of education, her worship, the flavor of age, these and other points of strength and beauty may and do turn many eyes and thoughts to her. But these are not what make her a power, except so far as they are backed by what all people, irreligious as well as religious, demand of a church — the earnest, enthusiastic spirit which has for its motive the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the carrying that into the hearts and lives of men; a spirit that knows no classes, rich or poor, high or

low, in service for her master, that sends out her word of comfort and truth, that stops not at preaching and worship, but enters into all the needs of men, into every work for lifting them from degradation into decency, from suffering into ease, from sickness into health, into all forms of charities and educational efforts; the spirit that instinctively throws itself on to the side of the right against the wrong.

It is the having or the not having this spirit which will make or unmake our Church. And I rejoice to say that that spirit increases mightily, that the men most honored in the Church are those who are most earnest in these things, that she is awakening to the sins and popular evils of the day and is bringing her forces to bear against them. Anyone who has watched our Church for a quarter of a century or even for ten years cannot but note the contrast. No claims of beauty of ritual or age or any such thing compares with the power of that spirit; and that, once recognized by the people, will turn their thoughts more directly to her beauties and other points of strength, and will lead men who cannot find what they have long been seeking elsewhere, into her fold.

Do not think me so foolish as to dream that in a few years all the American people will come flocking into the Church in masses. But I do believe, that taking all things into consideration, our Church has immense opportunities and a greater future than any Church in the country. She has much to learn, great changes and developments before her. I believe that she will be equal to them as the needs come; and that she may be and will be in the long future the Church of the American people, not because she claims it—never—but because she has by her zeal, her devotion, her broad but positive spirit and her peculiar beauties, earned the confidence and the love of the people.

We then, my friends, this Parish form one part in that body and that movement. If our hopes are such for the Church, what may they be for the Parish?

It is to this that I want next to turn your thoughts.

First. What is the make up of this Parish?

It has been a source of great satisfaction to me that it is not made up of one social class. It may be called by those who do not know, a fashionable church, or a church where the richer people go

and the poorer are not wanted; but I speak whereof I know when I say that it is a church of the people, in the sense that in it are all kinds of people. Aye, a large majority are of the poorer people, the working people, among whom I have worked, not because it was my duty, but my pleasure. If I have done a little for you, working people in this Parish, let me tell you that you have done far more for me. The words of regret which have come from many of you these last four weeks have touched me more than you knew as you spoke them. The pleasure of meeting you in your houses, of hearing your honest, plain talk, of seeing your faithful, hard working lives, of wondering at your sacrifice for each other and for sick neighbors, and your gifts for the Church, the gratification at seeing some of you lifted from degradation into honest, sober lives, of giving cheer and comfort to you and of receiving cheer and comfort from you—these are the things above all others, that I shall miss in my new field.

But to return; no one class forms the Parish; and I hope that no one class ever will form the Parish. I trust that the richer and more cultivated may always be here; their souls are as valued in

God's sight as the poor man's; they need the gospel as much; and more than that, they will find right in their own parish those for whom they can exercise the spirit of charity. That the humbler classes will always be here, I also trust. That no pride of money or dress, no false idea of a church for influential people will drive them slowly out. We are mutually helpful to each other; neither class (if we must call them classes) can get on without the other. Grace Church Parish, standing as it does in this manufacturing city, with its past history and its present condition, has an opportunity which few parishes in our Church have, to be a Church of the people, where all classes and conditions of men may meet together, and, with social and money distinctions dropped for the time, join in common prayer and praise.

But more than this; the Church standing right in the heart of the city, with its sins and its miseries under the very eaves, has a constant inspiration for earnest, hand to hand work.

Some churches by their position can hardly help becoming respectably dead; never this one.

The endless opportunities to help others in this city, the multitude of vices, the depth of degrada-

tion, the open sin which flaunts its shame in your faces, these and a thousand other forms, must rouse men who have anything of the spirit of Christ in them. The sins close by cry out against lethargy; and the Parish must be, it cannot help being, awake.

With such conditions let me tell you what have been my chief aims in my work and my preaching here among you.

First. I believe that faith in Christ the Saviour is so vital to men's souls, so necessary to every man, that I have not dared to hem and condition it by minor questions and discussions. Possibly some of you have felt that I have not laid stress enough on certain truths and dogmas, on certain other details and branches of the Faith; I have felt so often. But it was with the one aim that I might present the truth in its simplicity. Over seven years ago, on the Sunday after I was ordained Priest at that chancel rail, I preached from the text: "For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord." And that has been the object, so imperfectly realized, in my work. I wanted every man, woman and child to be convinced of the truth of Jesus Christ as their Saviour. While men were

hesitating and questioning on that, I dared not confuse and confound them with truths too high or too abstruse for their comprehension.

Amidst all the sin and temptations of our city life, for "in the midst of life we are in death," the first work was and is to help men free themselves from sin, withstand temptation and, through faith in Christ and by a holier life, prepare for the life to come. When once that was begun and the Saviour accepted, then was the time to lead the soul on. And from that great truth I have tried to suggest what springs from it: dependence on the Holy Spirit, prayer, earnest purpose, ceaseless spiritual growth by all the means which the God offers us.

My next effort and earnest wish has been in this direction.

I believe that the greatest practical obstacle to the growth of the Church and the power of Christ in this city arises from the inconsistent or unfaithful or unenthusiastic lives of some who call themselves Christians, and are members of our Churches. There is not one of us that has not winced under that fling against the Church. We suffer probably no more than other Churches. But my hope has

been that Grace Church members give no ground of offence in this thing. That we be "honest among the Gentiles," so that instead of their "speaking against us as evil doers, they may be our good works which they shall behold, glorify God." Nothing has disheartened me and sickened me more than to hear that a member of our Church caused scandal or reproach by his life. The gaps and sorrows from death have been as nothing to the sorrow of such disasters. My ideal has been that when a man was known to be a member of Grace Church, he was also by that known to be a Christian in life as well as in profession, a man of integrity, of truth, of temperance and of purity, of high strong character. And nothing has given me greater satisfaction than to know that a man, a member of our Church, possibly in a humble walk of life, held the respect of all his associates by his upright, honest life.

What this city needs more than any one thing, more even than a gigantic temperance wave, is a large, strong body of righteous men; and by that I mean, men who put themselves on the right side every time; not merely respectable, quiet, citizens who attend to their own business, but will not

move for the public good, not men who so shrink from fear of popular disfavor that they never take up a cause, right they confess, but likely to be unpopular at the time, not men who will be on the right side where there are no risks, but where there are risks you cannot find them. There are plenty of such in this city as in all cities. But what is wanted here is a body of citizens, wise men, but independent public spirited men, men who have so gained the confidence of the community by their honesty of purpose, that when they speak or act, the community can know that they may follow their lead and always be in the right; men who will not needlessly offend others but who will dare to offend when the right is in question; who make political interests, liquor interests, aye, and business interests, secondary to the interests of righteousness.

I care not whether a man comes to our Church from Congregationalist, from Unitarian Church or from the gutter, whether he is a high Churchman or a low Churchman, provided he is known to be true, open and square in all his dealings, manly in the best sense, never guilty of a mean or low act or of anything which he would not throw open to the sight of men and eye of God.

Where shall such men come from, if not from the Church of Him, who, though only a humble peasant, faced the whole commonplace respectability of his town and country and gave his life for the people and for the right? Let me repeat, my people, what I have told you many and many a time; let every member of Grace Church live up to his profession; earnest and true for the Saviour and the right.

Another ideal I have had.

That we be known as followers of Him who "went about doing good;" that every member have his or her part in some practical charity, and so labor for others, whether it be in Sunday School, in working, or distributing for the poor, in brightening the lives or homes of the wretched.

The Parish Church should be a centre light from which should radiate in many shades and colors the light of life; a source of charity, not confined to parish poor, but flowing into all parts of the city, all public charities, extending out to mission stations in the West and other lands. Whatever is for men's physical as well as moral welfare should find its impulse and power from the Church of the Saviour of men.

These three ideals, a personal faith in Jesus Christ, a consistent life, a spirit of charity in every member of the Church, cannot stand separate; "all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy Temple."

The Unity of the Parish life: we are not separate distinct members alone, we form one whole and are dependent on each other. This is what makes the strength of a Parish; not a preacher who may draw in a crowd, not a worship which is a continual sensation, but a oneness of spirit in the Parish life: an interest in the Parish as a Parish. It is a minister's hope that the Church of his charge is so welded together that no change or force of circumstances can diminish its strength, its work, and its influence.

And moreover, the Parish, like the man, has its name, its reputation in the community, formed from the make up of the whole. If that is high and strong, then every word or act of the Parish carries with it the weight of the whole.

That this Parish will grow in character, that its reputation may be higher, that its influence may be greater, that the impress of its life upon the community be stronger and deeper is my hearty wish and prayer.

On you, through God, depends the result.

I cannot stop without one look back.

As my memory reaches through these almost eight happy years, the figure that stands out most distinctly is that of Dr. Packard. I shall never cease to be grateful to him, not for the kind greeting and sympathetic help he gave me in those first months, but for the impress and character which he had given the Parish during his thirty years pastorate. It was a comparatively easy work for the man who entered into the labors of a pastor who had been so true, so faithful, so much respected in the community, who had not made his people restless for sensations or accustomed to great schemes and little action, but who had lead them steadily on in quiet, even work and faithful parochial life. The man who succeeded to such a pastor was sure to find his parish in a healthy condition on the whole and his position assured in the respect of the community.

And then as I look into your faces and see how many there are to whom Dr. Packard is only a name, I realize the change; how many have gone and others have come. Some have slipped out of Parish and city and are scattered over the country,

some are doing faithful work in other Parishes, in other towns and cities. And then as I open the Parish register, how many are fallen asleep. As I look down the aisles, spirits and faces other than yours haunt these places, all ages, classes and conditions, dear to me, even dearer to some of you. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; even so saith the Spirit, for the rest from their labors."

And you who remain, you that have come in these past few years and have thrown in your lot with the Parish. Many of you have done and are doing good and faithful work. But, Oh, how I wish I could inspire you, and give you hope and courage by telling of some of those earnest, faithful, patient, and sometimes suffering lives that have gone before and into whose labors you have entered.

But I cannot tell all. I must speak of one, only this week laid to rest. Her modest nature would shrink from public notice, but her life given for others was too noble to let us pass it unnoticed. As one who for many years put some of her best energies into our Parish work, who was foremost in all good deeds, and yet who would rather others should get the credit if she could only do the work; who in those years undertook almost every kind of

Parish work; and, what is more, who always did what she undertook. She allowed herself no excuses and gave her body no mercy, but whether worn out or sick she worked to the end; most faithful and earnest in our public worship, conscientious in every duty to the minister or for the people. If on Easter the chancel "blossomed as the rose" it was she who led in the work, if the children of the poor must learn to sew, she stood ready to organize and carry on the sewing school, if there was a family in need she was first to be on hand with aid and cheer, if there was hard and thankless work anywhere, she took that, that there might be no question that it should be done. But her work was only one feature of the life. Every smallest deed was backed by the character; that was the strength and joy of it all. Strong, modest, unselfish, never weary in well doing, ever bright and even tempered, as quick to decide as to act, patient; and all springing from a sure faith in her Saviour Christ, an unhesitating trust in her heavenly Father, an humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

"The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes the rest;
Sweet is the calm of Paradise the bless'd."

May God "come among us and with great might succor us," and raise up faithful lives who will take up the lines which her hands have dropped.

"God indeed has blessed us and has caused His face to shine upon us." We have had our joys and sorrows, our hopes and disappointments together. May God pardon me for what I have done amiss, and left undone. May you forget if any word or deed of mine has given you pain or trouble.

To you who have done faithful work, who have aided in any kind of Parish duties, I give hearty thanks, believing that it was done not first for my sake, but in the service of the Parish and the Master. May the same spirit and the same work go on while you live.

God Almighty grant that you may all worship and work together "in the Unity of the Spirit and the Bond of Peace," that this Church may be a light to darkened souls a tower of strength, to the weak and an Holy Temple to the devout followers of the Saviour.