

The end of Jonathan Miller's dedication sermon, given on January 7, 1809

copied from the original hand written notebook by
Clifford Alderman. (Some very difficult to decipher)

--that from the beginning it has been highly esteemed for its great and happy effects, --that it is of the highest importance as instrumental to our eternal interests, and that it is also worthy of regard, for its benign influence on civil society and social intercourse; --this last has been illustrated by contrasting the state of society, where public Christian worship is seriously attended, with those parts of the world where it is not known, and even with those who neglect it in our own land, that by actual observation, made on faith, we might discover its excellence in this world. We must now attend to some h

Reflections and Remarks

Being this day convened for the purpose of consecrating this house to almighty God, and setting it apart for his service, as devoted to public Christian worship, as its principal end; those who appreciate the sacred institution must rejoice. It is an occasion that demands joy, and that with gratitude and earnest supplications, like those of Solomon, we should appear before God to dedicate the sanctuary. It is an offering we make unto God, a place where we hope to behold his glory, and enjoy his presence. Ought we not then to apply unto him with earnest prayer, that He would graciously accept the offering, that He would meet us in this place from Sabbath to Sabbath, and on other occasional religious meetings, that He would behold us in mercy in this place, and graciously hear all the prayers that may be offered with sincerity, and dwell among us, and bless us with the rich outpourings of his spirit upon all the people. Thus were the tabernacle and the temple set apart for God, and thus it has been usual to dedicate Christian churches to his service.

But before the house shall be thus sanctified by prayer, let us thankfully notice the good hand of God towards us for years past, in his dealings with us since we were incorporated as an ecclesiastical society.

For fifty years past, there have been a few families in this town. It increased but very gradually, for the forest and the (heather) were almost annually burnt, and the soil by that means made thin and naked.

In the year 1774, there were a small number of inhabitants settled about in almost every quarter of the town, and being a great distance from any place of public worship, they wished to be incorporated as an ecclesiastical society, that they might be accommodated among themselves, and they received a charter from the legislature for that purpose, thirty four years ago. Immediately, on the very next year, the distressing revolutionary war of the present United States of America commenced. We were attacked with the fleets and armies of Great Britain continued nearly 8 years. This war particularly distressing to our infant settlement on account of their particular circumstances. No exemptions from the public taxation could be obtained in our favor, the exigencies of the country admitted of no such immunities. The inhabitants were generally poor, and became necessarily involved in debt, their land wild and unimproved, except some small beginnings; the support of their families, the clearing their land, the erection of dwellings, fences, and shelter for their cattle, demanded more than all their time and strength. Those who know the hardships of beginning a new settlement in a wilderness, have however, no adequate idea of the distresses of this society: For they were subject according to their (poles) to the same military drafts and imprisonments as the older settlements where houses and barns were already built, their families comfortable, and their lands in a state of good cultivation. Young men, and the fathers of young families, were worried by alarms, and called to frequent tours of military duty; while the remainder of the families to which they belonged,

suffered extreme hardships, in addition to their anxiety for the safety of those who were gone to war. The improvement of their lands, on which the support of their lives, and the lives of their families depended, was at a stand, and the public taxes were high. It is impossible even for our elderly people to retrace all their extremities, much less can I impress an adequate idea of them, upon the generations which have since arisen. The whole country was extremely impoverished, and this society had a distinguished lot of sufferings. Yet, by the blessing of God on their almost incredible industry, they gradually advanced, and every year their circumstances became more comfortable.

But to their praise be it spoken, and as an example to their children, in the midst of all their difficulties, they manifested a laudable zeal to enjoy the ordinances of the gospel. Various preachers were successfully employed among them, and their congregations assembled in barns, and private houses. This was inconvenient, and a general desire appeared to erect a house for public worship. Numerous meetings were holden for the purpose, and different plans devised, and stakes pitched. But before the close of the war, notwithstanding every embarrassment they had erected a meeting-house, and there they held their assemblies for divine service. And the next year, which was the year in which the treaty of peace was ratified, they had one settled with them in the gospel ministry.

Since then, the same habits of general industry have continued and achieved from the calamities of war, thro' the goodness of God, we have greatly increased in numbers and wealth, and now rival the older settlements about us in the comforts and conveniences of life.

It would be ungrateful not to notice the special goodness of divine providence, in enabling this infant society to struggle thro' such sore embarrassments, from an uncultivated forest, high taxation, poverty and war, arid disposing them, in the midst of all these discouragements, to exert themselves with such zeal and success in providing for the enjoyment of gospel ordinances.

It has been no small increase to the perplexity of past years, that a considerable number of inhabitants deserted the society, tho' that might have been expected. But thro' the goodness of God, those days of extremity are past, and we now have a comfortable prospect before us. The Lord grant, that we may take heed to ourselves, against the temptations of prosperity, lest it harden our hearts to the neglect of divine things.

As to our town privileges, we remained a part of Farmington, till within about twenty-three years; when we and New Cambridge were incorporated by the name of Bristol; we became a town by ourselves on the 16th of June, 1806.

Thus in the course of about 34 years, notwithstanding every embarrassment, God has in his providence bestowed such blessings, that from a few scattered cottages, we are brought to our present state, and this decent house is a witness of his goodness. May it be a place of rich spiritual communication to us, and to succeeding generations.

The goodness of God to us will be further manifest, by considering his dealings with the church in this society.

This church of Christ was first gathered on the third of July, 1783, a little more than 25 years ago, and tho' the number of communicants then amounted to but 26, who bringing letters of recommendation from other churches, to which they belonged, were formed into church fellowships with each other, yet it was a time of great solemnity and rejoicing, and an instance of the goodness and mercy of God, which might well comfort and animate the friends of Zion. God then planted

a visible church of Christ, which is truly an important event. Zion was set up in this society; and may it continue to the end of time; and from this branch, may innumerable saints be transplanted to the church above.

Not far from this time, God was pleased to grant us the influences of his Holy Spirit, give his children a precious refreshing, and call a number who were dead in sin, into his fold. This, I believe, was the first revival of religion, which attracted the general attention of the people, after the incorporation of the society.

Between 2 and 5 months after the formation of the church, the present pastor, after preaching here, the greatest part of the time, far more than a year, was solemnly consecrated to the work of the gospel ministry, and installed over this church.

The church from the first has been preserved in general peace and harmony; we have been permitted, without interruption, to assemble for Christian worship, the special ordinances of the New Testament have been administered, and we have sat together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The members of the church became gradually more numerous by new accessions, till within about nine years. But God had richer blessings in store for us than anything that we had ever seen, and greater than our unbelieving hearts had expected to receive.

Early in the year 1799 the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven among us with power. A general attention to the things of religion took place, thro' almost the whole parish, our meetings were (scious) on the Sabbath, and were attended with solemnity several other times in the week. Levity, balls, and other diversions were long laid aside, and the concerns of religious and eternity, about all other things, engaged the attention, and became the matter of most interesting discourses of a large proportion of the people. The church and the congregation acknowledged that God was among us in every deed. With what emotion do many of us retrace in frequent reflection that blessed time, some, as the season of richer communications of divine grace and comfort, than they had ever before enjoyed, and some, as the time in which they humbly hope they were brought out of darkness into marvelous light? In that, and the year following, 52 were added to the church.

It would also be ungrateful in us not to recollect with thankful acknowledgements at this time, the special presence of God in one part of the parish, between 2 and 3 years ago. May God return among us, exercise his power and grace, exceeding all that we have yet beheld.

The church has since continued to receive additions to its numbers. The whole number who have been members of this communion mount according to the records to 183: 52 have removed from us with recommendations to other churches; 23 we hope are now enjoying their divine Lord, perfected in holiness, and transplanted into his heavenly kingdom, and 100 still remain. The Lord give us grace, that we may serve him faithfully here below, see Zion prosper, and be prepared to unite with all the redeemed in everlasting glory. And () may large additions, of more pious believers than ourselves, be continually added to this portion of the church of Christ.

There has been a good agreement and harmony from the first, both in this church, and in the society, and between them: and may it long continue and increase.

We are now for the first time convened in this house, which God has enabled us to build for his worship. And while we rejoice on the occasion, we cannot but perceive ourselves as strangers in it. Here we have never met before, have never have held communion with God and with each other in the sweet employments of

devotion. And we have never heard the matchless love of our divine redeemer declared, nor attended the sacred memorials of his death within these walls. Our feelings lead our reflections back to yonder building, coarse, small and decaying. There one and another can go and say, here in this place I sat trembling and bowed down, under the consciousness of an heart unspeakably corrupt, and the tenors of the Lord on my rebellious soul drank up my spirits, while I heard the weighty truths of the word of God: --There, on that seat I heard the first sermon that reached my heart. There I felt my soul drawn out in love, and flew with transport, and joys before unknown, on the glad tidings of salvation. In that alley I stood, and (avouched) the Lord Jehovah, Father, son and Holy Ghost, to be my God, and entered into covenant to be the Lord's. And from that holy table I have received the sacred symbols of the body and blood of my redeemer, in solemn joyful communion with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

To many of us the memory of that house is precious, and it will be long, probably forever remembered, as the place where God has often fed us with the bread of life.

But regret not that the fashion of this world passeth away. Tabernacles, temples and sanctuaries were not designed to continue: We ourselves shall soon resign to the dust. God is the same, and with respect to spiritual communications, he can make the glory of this house richer than the old. Here we may feast our hearts on the divine glories. And here, the Lord grant, that many hundreds may soon make a sincere confession of the Christian faith, and may our eyes behold and be blessed with the joyful sight.

But alas! Must not some of us reflect, that in yonder deserted building, we have grown hardened under the most solemn truths, have there heard and rejected the addresses of redeeming love, have disregarded the tenors of the Lord, and have in vain been admonished of the wrath to come. Those walls are the witnesses of the long suffering compassion of God, and of the obstinate perverseness of those who have persevered in the rejections of his grace. But may he, whose tender mercies are above the heavens, pardon this great iniquity, and visit us all with his salvation. And in this new sanctuary, may we receive a rich earnest? Of the kingdom of heaven.

It is God who has given both the ability and the heart to set up this building; and would he have done it, if he had not good still in store to be bestowed on us? He will, we trust, accept the offering he enables us to make, as he did the sanctuaries of old, and will here bless his own institutions. He, who heard the prayer of Solomon, remains the same, and will as readily answer the supplications, which we may offer him in the sincerity of our hearts. Let us earnestly entreat his blessing.

We have erected this house with the avowed design, that it should be a place for religious worship: and is it not a pledge yet we give to our God, that we will here attend his worship, according to all that he requires, and be constant at the sanctuary, and to all the gracious institutions he has appointed us? Yet, it is an offering by which we declare our appreciation of divine worship, and by implication, pledge ourselves to attend upon it: and it is unnecessary to repeat what has been said on the privilege and (About 3 lines of the end is missing)