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JUN 24 1982

Talmage, T. De Witt

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“GOOD CHEER.”



A COMMEMORATIVE SERMON.

“GOOD CHEER.”

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

First Reformed Dutch Church

OF PHILADELPHIA,

MAY 18th, 1862,

BY

REV. T. DE WITT TALMAGE,

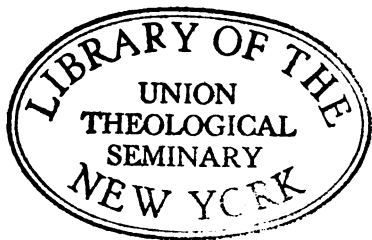
PASTOR OF SECOND R. D. C., PHILADELPHIA.

COMMEMORATIVE.

PHILADELPHIA:

A. M. SPANGLER, PRINTER, 25 NORTH SIXTH STREET. •

1862.



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ADVERTISEMENT.

This sermon was preached in the First Reformed Dutch Church of Philadelphia, under the following circumstances :

Certain members and trustees of that church, in the year 1861 seceded. The minister whom they had called, would not sign the formula of our church, or submit to examination by classis, and, consequently, could not, according to the usages of our Reformed Dutch Church, be installed as pastor. These disaffected members commenced a law suit, for the purpose of getting possession of the church building, corner of Seventh and Spring Garden Streets.

Passing up from court to court, at last, in the month of May, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania delivered the following decree :

Decree.

“ These two cases came on for hearing at the last term of this Court at Philadelphia, on an appeal from final decree thereon of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia, and was argued by counsel, and it is now here ordered that the first of the said causes be consolidated with second one, and on full and mature consideration, it is decreed and declared that the resolution of the 7th of February, 1861, passed by a majority of the voters at a congregational meeting of the First Reformed Dutch Church of the City and vicinity of Philadelphia to withdraw the said church from its connection with the Reformed Dutch Church of North America, is null and void as an act of the said congregation, and that the organization of the said majority in separation from its said connection, was a secession thereof from the said First Reformed Dutch Church, and that the minority who remained, continued to constitute the lawful congregation under their charter, and are, with such of the majority as return to the usual and common order of the said church, entitled to all the rights thereof; and that the trustees of the said

church have no lawful right or authority to provide supplies, or a pastor for the vacant pulpit thereof, or in any way to interfere as trustees therein, but that this duty, according to the constitution of the Reformed Dutch Church of North America, belongs to the consistory of the particular church, and that that portion of the said church and congregation who remain in connection with the said Reformed Dutch Church of North America, are entitled to the papers, documents, and books of the said congregation, and to the management and control of all the property thereof; and it is further ordered and decreed, that the defendants, and each of them, be strictly enjoined from any interference with the affairs or management of the congregation, that is inconsistent with this decree, and from any sort of interference therein until they severally signify to the trustees of the lawful congregation their return to connection therewith, and that a writ of injunction issue accordingly, and that the defendants individually named pay the costs, and that the bills as against the trustees as an official body, be dismissed."

The final settlement of this vexed question, to the thorough satisfaction of the particular church interested, and to the Reformed Dutch Church at large, was considered worthy of especial thanksgiving. Therefore, the Consistory of the First Church invited Rev. T. De Witt Talmage, pastor of the Second Church, to preach for them May 18th, commemorating in his sermon this victory of order, justice, and sound doctrine.

Other congregations united in the service, offering their thanksgiving and extending their congratulations.

CORRESPONDENCE.

REV. T. DE WITT TALMAGE:

Dear Sir.—The undersigned, members of the Consistory of the First Reformed Dutch Church of Philadelphia, tender you their sincere thanks for the very able and appropriate sermon, delivered on Sabbath morning, the 18th, in our church, in commemoration of the recent decision of the Supreme court, and respectfully request a copy of the same for publication, in order that we may be gratified with the perusal of a discourse which gave us, as well as the congregation, great pleasure and satisfaction.

By so doing, you will greatly oblige

Yours Truly,

CHARLES J. SUTTER,
L. C. VOUTE,
HENRY A. BOWER,
WILLIAM RORER,
C. B. SELLERS.

Philadelphia, May 19, 1862.

PHILADELPHIA, MAY 19, 1862.

Dear Brethren:

You request for publication a copy of the sermon preached in the First Reformed Dutch Church of this city, last Sabbath morning.

Although the sermon was prepared in the greatest possible haste, and delivered only from full analysis, I will, at my earliest convenience, reduce the discourse to writing, and place it at your disposal.

With many thanks for the kindness of your letter, and a prayer for your prosperity as a church,

I am yours, &c.

T. DE WITT TALMAGE.

To Charles J. Sutter, L. C. Voute, Henry A. Bower, William Rorer, C. B. Sellers, Consistory, &c.

SERMON.

ACTS, 27: 22.—And now I exhort you to be of good cheer.

JUDGES, 7: 3.—Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead.

THE ship that in our day puts out to sea, having on board charts, and maps, and modern compass, and weather beaten tars, who, from crossing all waters, have learned the tides, and the tempests, and the light-houses, knows nothing of the perils of ancient navigation, when the crazy crafts crept along uncertain coasts, and Jonah sailed for Tarshish, and the disciples crossed Gennesaret, and the exiled John started for Patmos, and Paul's vessel went staving into the breakers of Melita.

Our text is partly taken from that vivid description of the storm which swooped upon the Mediterranean, when Paul was voyaging to Rome: a description so natural, that while reading it, you seem to see one of our modern vessels passing before you, and hear the creaking of the bulkheads, and the thump of the tackling, and the loud moan of the sea tossed up into terrific Euroclydon, and the cry of the midshipman, and the loud "Aye! Aye! Sir!" of drenched sailors tugging at the ropes, and the wild scream of the shipwrecked, as the vessel on the rocks goes "Crash! Crash!"

The tempest has increased in violence, until "No Hope" is written on the bronzed cheeks of the sailors and the blanched

countenances of the passengers, written on an angry sky and in the tangled froth of the deep. But there is one passenger, who with all calmness looks out upon the terror. The God who made the sea, and winged the tempest, is his Father; and turning to the excited crew and the despairing passengers, he exclaims in a voice that sounds above the thunder of the tempest, and the wrath of the sea, "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer."

The church of God has often been caught in Euroclydons fiercer than that in which Paul was driven. Ever since God launched it, it has run into the "wind's eye." Many a time it has lain "on beam ends." It demanded, at times, all the strength of her Luthers, and her Melancthons, and her Knoxs', and her Calvins, to "Tack ship off shore." She has trembled from cut-water to taffrail. At times, it has seemed as if with all her priceless cargo of blessings and ordinances she must go down. From amid heterodoxies, and wild schisms, and unholy practices, and financial distresses, she exclaimed, "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." The Hildebrands, and the Neros, and the Robespierres, and the Jeffreys, sat on the shore waiting to pick up the fragments of the wreck. But through these seas of blood and these tempests of fire, Christ has been exhorting her to be of "Good cheer," and she has gone on building other churches, and establishing other civilizations, and endowing other universities, and saving other millions, until the whole earth begins to tremble with the movement of her printing presses, and the tramp of a great multitude of the Redeemed coming to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

We assemble to-day under extraordinary circumstances. This church, after long tribulation and embarrassment, in which law, and order, and sound doctrine, have been contending for the

ascendency, comes to keep the feast of Tabernacles. Like your church-fathers, you have stood unfaltering in the siege of Leyden, and wonder not that we come from other sanctuaries to-day, to bid you be of good cheer, and to take down all your harps from the willows, now that your church has got back from her long captivity.

People of God! If you hold your peace to-day, these altars and these walls will cry out, saying, "Oh! give thanks unto the Lord: for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. To Him which divided the Red Sea into parts: for his mercy endureth forever. But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea: for his mercy endureth forever. To Him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth forever. To Him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth forever. Sihon, king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth forever. And Og, the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth forever. Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth forever. Oh! give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth forever."

Avoiding everything that would seem like unkindness of feeling toward those of our brethren who have differed from you in this matter of litigation, and wishing them all prosperity for time and eternity, let us, to-day, offer *six reasons* why this church should take the counsel of my text and be of good cheer.

I begin by saying that you ought to be greatly encouraged, because *you have a commodious and beautiful house in which to worship.*

The erection of a new church is a stupendous undertaking. A large amount of money must be raised, a thousand tastes are to be consulted, questions as to locality and style of architecture

are to be decided. Amid prayers, and tears, and self-denials, the house of God goes up, until, after awhile, the scaffolding is removed, and the upholstery hung, and the congregation assembles, and the house is dedicated in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Only those who have put their hand to such a toil, and had their shoulder under such a burden, know the tremendous exertion demanded for such an enterprise.

You have none of these toils or perils to endure. Your self-sacrifices in the past have completed the work, and here it stands beautiful for situation, its walls already hallowed by precious memories, and a church yet to be the scene of many solemn sacraments, and the place where multitudes of souls are to be prepared for glory.

Among mountain fastnesses, God's people have worshipped; the voice of their praise mingling with the dash of waters, and the howl of beasts of prey: yea, sometimes in lowly cabins, through which the snow drifted and the rain beat. The waters of baptism have been dipped from the spring in the rock, and the wine of the Lord's supper drank from rough hewn wooden bowls. Christ's religion has bared its brow to every exposure, and bent its back to the heaviest burden, and knelt in desert, wilderness and moor; but this is no reason why we should not erect for Christ's service, massive wall, and graceful arch, and imposing capital, and lofty spire. While under the great shadows of costly cathedral, piety may sit chilled and shivering, and by the dim light that streams through painted glass, our simple faith may find it difficult to read its title clear to mansions in the skies, still all must admit that architectural genius and taste can do much for God by making our sanctuaries elegant,

commodious, and impressive. We want not extravagant expenditure, no porch like that of Rheims, or roof like that of Amiens, or tower like that of Antwerp, or traceried windows like those of Fribourg: nevertheless, the time for box pulpits, and low ceilings, and damp sepulchral basements, and straight-backed pews, and unventilated audience rooms, has passed, and public sentiment in all churches says, "Give us light! Give us air! Give us room!" Looking around upon this church to-day, we are compelled to exclaim, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, oh, Lord of hosts!"

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has decided that it is your house. You will forgive all the delays and uncertainties of the law, and if at any time in your worldly interests you have suffered from what seemed the injustice of legal proceedings, being obliged to pay for goods you never received, or to pay rent for houses you never occupied, you will recall all the harsh things you have ever said, when you remember that the highest court of your State has written upon all the records, and the pews, and the pulpit, and the pillars of this church, in words so plain, that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein, "This is the property of the First Reformed Dutch Church of the city of Philadelphia, by them to be held and enjoyed forever."

Again: Be of good cheer, because *you have a large field to cultivate.*

How strange that there ever should be jealousies among churches about fields of usefulness, this church claiming the ground and that church claiming it: as though two ships, mid-Atlantic, were quarreling for sea room, with a world of water on all sides. What folly for churches with oceans of iniquity all around about, to be contending for sea room.

Go forth, then, shoulder to shoulder with other churches, knowing that there is an infinity of work to be accomplished in this city. God has set this church as a tower, from which are to be blown the trumpets of alarm, of invitation, and spiritual resurrection. Let it stand as a lighthouse, with its good cheer streaming upon the dark billows of trouble, and warning off benighted voyagers from the rocks of perdition. It is a fortress, from which all the weaponry of the truth is to be levelled against the forces of unrighteousness. Go forth to alleviate sorrow, to enlighten ignorance, and to put bit and bridle upon these swift iniquities, jerking them back upon their haunches.

The greatest honor that any man can bestow upon the church, is not by saying "I saw hundreds of flashing vehicles at the church door, and senators, and foreign ministers, and merchant princes, going in to attend service." But the greatest honor that a man can bestow, is to say "That is a poor man's church."

Go forth to your mission. Thrust in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe, and the garner of God are waiting to be replenished, and all the angels of heaven are ready to shout "Harvest home!"

Again: You ought to be encouraged by the fact that *you are set to proclaim as glorious a system of doctrines as God ever handed down from heaven.*

We do not hide them under doubtful theological definition, but we inscribe them on our banners.

We do not believe in the damnation of infants. We do not believe that God made some men for the purpose of destroying them. We do not believe that because God decreed all things from the beginning, therefore sometimes bad men go to heaven, and good men go to hell.

Our doctrines so far from being dull, or impracticable, or shocking, are beautiful, and glorious, and wonder-working.

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, an unlimited Sovereign, from eternity in wisdom and goodness arranging all things that occur in heaven and on earth, a Deliverer for the distressed, a Friend for the friendless, a Home for the homeless. We believe in Jesus Christ, a Saviour, infinite, precious, willing to save to the uttermost, rescuing the condemned through his atonement, and imparting his righteousness to the believer: in the Holy Ghost, the comforter and the sanctifier, cheering up the heart in life's ills, and kindling bright lights in every dark landing place.

We believe that man has sunk to such utter ruin, that nothing short of an Almighty arm can lift him up out of the darkness. We believe in Grace, free Grace, triumphant Grace, sovereign Grace, eternal Grace!! We believe in an inspired Bible, for private interpretation and unlimited distribution, authentic in its statements, immaculate in its teachings, glorious in its promises. We believe in an eternal heaven, the home of the righteous, and in an eternal hell, the abode of soul-suicides, who recklessly and of their own free will refused the Divine rescue. We believe in the salvation of all who receive Jesus Christ by faith, whether they have been sprinkled or plunged, whether they worship in cathedral or log cabin, whether they believe in Episcopacy or Presbyterianism, whether they were born under Italian skies or in Siberian snow storms, be they Americans or Ethiopians.

These truths you will find written in our catechisms, and inspiring our songs, and breathing in our prayers, and flaming out in our sermons.

Glorious doctrines! While we live we will proclaim them, and dying they shall send their illumination into the dark valley, and having passed the flood, under trees of life, and on banks of crystalline rivers, and among the thrones of the glorified, we will still celebrate their meaning on the harps we will sound, by the palms we will wave—in the hallelujahs we will utter.

Again: This church ought to be of good cheer, from the fact that *it has the sympathy and congratulation of our entire denomination.*

In olden times, when two nations were in contention, they would sometimes send forth each a warrior, the twain in fierce grapple to decide the question in dispute. Our denomination has sent forth this church as their champion to contend for certain great principles. And if in olden time the warrior felt himself honored by being thus selected, shall not this church feel the highest distinction conferred upon it as a champion for the truth.

While we ought to have a heart large enough to take in all denominations of Christians, there ought to be a still more intimate sympathy between members of the same ecclesiastical family, between those churches which look back to a common origin, to a common history, to common perils. And let me say, that the trials of this particular church have been discussed in many of our church courts and consistories, and in all the intelligent families of our denomination, and the joy which you utter in your songs to-day, will have its echo on the banks of the Raritan, the Hudson, and the Mohawk. And though you may carry the marks of the wounds you have received in this contest for many a year, remember that they are honorable scars, and you will no more be ashamed of them, than the soldier of our country thirty

years from now will be ashamed to roll up his sleeve and say, "That wound I received at Williamsburg, or Pittsburg Landing."

Again: This church ought to be encouraged, by the fact that *you have been contending for a principle.*

Most collisions between man and man, between government and government, between despotism and despotism, are merely struggles of ambition for earthly sway, and the sound of a thousand such war drums moves not the soul except to horror and disgust. But when we see an orphan in court contending for his rights, or a widow attempting to snatch back her property from fraudulent executors, or a community contending for the expulsion of a nuisance, or a church attempting to quell misrule, or a nation, like ours at the present time, going forth to help in a struggle between all that is right and all that is wrong, we cannot avoid being interested. The sound of Luther's hammer nailing up his protest against the door of the Electoral college, still rings through all Christendom, and the fire of John Huss' martyrdom still has its reflection on the memory of all who admire heroism, because they fought for a principle.

Rejoice that so soon the right has conquered! Sometimes, through long centuries the wrong has seemed to triumph, and order, and justice, and truth, have sat age after age in sackcloth and ashes. The enemies of God have said "Aha! Aha!" and not until the fourth watch of the night has Jesus come walking on the sea. Galileo died before his principle was acknowledged. Columbus died before the chief glories of this continent had been revealed. John Wickliffe died before the Reformation. Jesus died before his church began its most illustrious conquest. And the cry of philanthropists, and missionaries, and martyrs, has been, "How long! oh, Lord, how long!"

But to this church, the wilderness journey has been *comparatively* short, and before they suspected it, they have passed through the Red Sea of trouble dry-shod, and are standing to-day upon the other bank praising the God, who all the while has been commanding them to "Go forward."

The year 1862 will be memorable for two things. I think we will be able to look back and say, "In the year 1862, secession in civil government died at the hand of the sword, and secession in the church died from the decision at Harrisburg. Peace to its ashes."

Finally: The greatest reason for encouragement *is the promise of Christ's help.*

Brethren, you have seen dark days in this church. You could not bear to think that this sacred house, at whose altar your children have been baptized, at whose communion table you had sat with some already gone to glory, and from which some of you had carried out your precious dead, should go out of your possession. God saw all your tears, he heard all your prayers, and he knew the agony of your soul when in secret you exclaimed, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. If I forget thee, oh, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."

But if God has not forsaken you in the past, certainly you can trust Him for the future. "Upon this Rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her." No power short of that which can upheave the Rock of Ages, can toss you from your foundations. All the promises of the Gospel press themselves upon your acceptance. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," "Lo, I am with you always," and scores of other assurances that urge you forward

with high expectation, and ardent prayers, and intensified exertion. To a church like this, planted in God's providence, dedicated to his service, baptized by his spirit, shielded by his care, living to his glory, I may appropriately say, "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer."

Nay, I will go further, and if there be any timid souls, who, by their want of faith in the success of their enterprise, chill the enthusiasm of their leaders, I will tell them as Gideon did his army, when they were about to go out to combat, and they did not want to be impeded by the cowardly and incredulous—*"Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead."* He is unfit to serve in this cause, who believes that, God helping, there is *anything* that can't be done.

"If God be for us, who can be against us. He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us, for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In God's name, I charge you to bestir yourselves to great activity. Let no time be lost in the selection of a pastor. There are scores of mighty reapers, who are ready at your call to come on with their sickles, men of prayer, men of faith, men of God. He who sent Richard Baxter to Kidderminster, and Robert McCheyne to Dundee, and John to Ephesus, and Paul to Rome, will send you just the right man, at just the right time.

Onward, then, to harder work and sublimer successes! Let cowards fly. Quit *you* like men. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Passing on from one achievement to another, before your advance crime will fall, and ignorance be scattered, and sin perish; and the world amazed at your progress, men will come out from their stores, and their offices, and their schools, to ask, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

Gather up all your forces and hurl them upon the powers of darkness. Charge! Their ranks waver. Their columns are broken. They fly. Victory! Victory! The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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