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THE GATES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,
AND
THE BLESSEDNESS OF ENTERING INTO THEM

—•••••—
A S E R M O N,

FROM PSALM CXVIII. 19.

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF
A NEW EPISCOPAL CHAPEL,
IN THE PARISH OF LONGSIDE, ABERDEENSHIRE,
ON THURSDAY THE 16TH OF APRIL, 1801.

BEING ALSO
THE DAY OBSERVED BY THE CONGREGATION OF THAT
CHAPEL, AS AN ANNUAL THANKSGIVING
AFTER THE FESTIVAL OF EASTER. f.

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
TO THE MEMBERS OF THAT CONGREGATION,
BY THEIR AFFECTIONATE BISHOP,
AND FAITHFUL SERVANT IN CHRIST,
JOHN SKINNER.

—•••••—
Aberdeen:

PRINTED BY J. CHALMERS AND Co.

1801.

100 e. 1359 (17)



P S A L M CXVIII. 19.

[*Prayer Book Translation.*]

OPEN ME THE GATES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THAT I MAY
GO IN TO THEM, AND GIVE THANKS UNTO THE LORD.

AMONG all the various occasions which have called me to appear before you, in the character wherein I am now to address you, I cannot recollect any that has afforded me more real pleasure and satisfaction, than what I presently feel, in complying with the invitation I received, to bear my share in the opening of this house, for the worship and service of our God and Redeemer. The ties of natural affection by which I am bound to both your pastors,* and to the place of my nativity; the relation I bear to that particular district of the Christian Church, of which you form so respectable a part, and the intimate acquaintance which I have long so happily enjoyed with many of the members of this Congregation, all unite in impressing on my mind a most grateful sense of the agreeable duty which I have now to discharge, and an earnest desire to participate in your feelings on this happy occasion of our meeting together. For happy, I have no doubt, you will consider the present opportunity

* The Author's Father and Nephew, the first of whom has held the charge of the Episcopal Congregation in Longside, upwards of 58 years, and still performs a part of the pastoral duty in it.

nity of contemplating the goodness of that gracious Providence, by which the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls watches over the flock of his pasture in all parts of the Christian world.

As a small portion of that blessed flock, you have experienced the merciful protection of its heavenly Guide and Guardian, displayed in a variety of instances, which the older members of this Congregation will easily recollect, and cannot fail to look back upon with holy and devout admiration. To *them* who have witnessed, and to all of you who have heard of the strange vicissitudes of situation, in which the public and solemn services of religion have been performed among you, for a period of between fifty and sixty years; it must appear as a circumstance wonderfully calculated to excite the most pious and fervent gratitude, that after so many changes and alterations in your places of public worship, you are this day blessed with the privilege of assembling in a house erected for that purpose, the accommodation of which is perfectly suited to the present happy state of the Church to which we belong, and leaves us no room to regret the want of those edifices of which it was deprived, something more than a century ago.

Reflecting, as we ought to do, with much comfort and thankfulness of heart, on these pleasing testimonies of the care and kindness of our gracious Lord, so agreeably manifested in behalf of his faithful people; I hope you will see the propriety of my applying the passage of scripture I have now read before you, to the pious and laudable purpose for which you have been this day called together; and being thus assembled, for the first time, in a house that has been so solemnly dedicated to the glory of God, and the service of
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his Church, I shall presume, that every person within these walls has approached the entrance to them, with such a devout and worthy sentiment, as that expressed in the words of my text, “ Open me the gates of righteousness, that I “ may go in to them, and give thanks unto the Lord.”

The psalm, of which these words are a part, at first sight appears to be a solemn thanksgiving of the King of Israel for his own peaceable establishment in the royal throne, and the settlement of the Ark of God in the holy tabernacle which had been prepared for its reception. It was, no doubt, at first delivered in a public congregation, and the people had all some share in it. However, the greatest part was spoken by the royal Prophet himself, whose gratitude takes fire, and breaks forth in a rapture of praise at the very entrance of the psalm. “ O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, because his mercy endureth for ever.” He then calls upon all the servants of God, the priests as well as the people, to join with him in giving thanks unto the Lord. “ Let Israel now say, let the house of Aaron now say, let all that fear the Lord now confess, that his mercy endureth for ever.” Thus inviting his people to be as devout as himself, when the pious monarch arrived at the place of God’s appointed worship, he calls out in haste, to open to him the gates of righteousness, that he might go into the holy sanctuary, and praise the Lord; to which the openers of the gates are supposed to make answer, pointing, as it were, to the holy place, “ This is the gate of the Lord, into which the righteous enter.” And he replies, addressing himself to that Lord, “ I will thank thee, for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation:” after which the whole congregation join, as it were, in a joyful shout, “ The stone which the builders

“ Lord’s doing,” the work of his omnipotent hand, the effect of his immutable counsel, “ and it is marvellous in our eyes.” Well then might they add on such a glorious occasion, “ this is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it;” looking forward in faith and hope to that blessed day, when the Redeemer of the world, though dead, and buried, and laid in a guarded sepulchre, was from thence to rise immortal, and become the head of an immortal society, for whom the gates of heaven were to be opened, and the everlasting doors lifted up, that he might enter in, as the King of glory, and prepare mansions of eternal bliss for all his faithful followers. Then it was, that the rejected stone became, in the most exalted sense, the head of the corner; and to this truly marvellous event, several parts of the psalm before us are evidently pointed. “ The voice of joy and health is in the dwellings of the righteous. The right hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass. I shall not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened and corrected me, but he hath not given me over unto death.” These are passages which manifestly declare the wonderful blessings and benefits arising from our Saviour’s glorious victory over death. The everlasting mercies of Jehovah, which are repeatedly celebrated in the four first verses, do most clearly point to this victory, as that which made the mercies of the Lord eternal. Christ being set in a large place, as mentioned in the next verse, evidently refers to his enlargement from the narrow prison of the grave to a boundless and a glorious kingdom. His rejoicing in the thought, that he shall see his desire upon them that hate him; his declaring that “ it is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in man;” the power given him to destroy all his enemies

enemies in the name of the Lord :—all these expressions plainly denote the effects of his royal dignity to be permanent and extensive, and such as are exactly agreeable to his own declaration immediately after his resurrection, “ All power is given to me in heaven and in earth.”

Keeping this beautiful connection between the subject of the psalm before us, and the design for which we are assembled here this day, always in our eye, you will be at no loss to discover, and I shall be happy in pointing out, the powerful motives which should induce us to give thanks unto the Lord this day. First, from the consideration of the holy and blessed festival, which we have lately been celebrating ; and then, from the opening to us those gates of righteousness, and allowing us to enter into them this day, for the express purpose of giving thanks to that Lord, who, as we acknowledge in that admirable hymn of praise, which we address to Christ the King of glory, when “ he overcame the sharpness of death, did open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.” Surely then, when our gracious Lord hath opened up a way for so many blessings to descend upon us, as members of his Church below, and heirs of his everlasting kingdom above, we cannot but earnestly beseech him, as I hope we have done this day, “ to open also our lips, that our mouths may show forth his praise.”

The first and principal subject of that praise which we offer to him this day, ought no doubt to be the glorious event which we have been once more commemorating, by the return of that holy Festival which has been always observed in the Christian Church, as the blessed anniversary of our Lord’s *resurrection*, that marvellous event which accomplished the mighty work of our redemption, and justified

us in the sight of our heavenly Father, which laid the foundation of all our hopes, and completed all our happiness. Justly then might the psalmist observe, that such a marvellous work was Jehovah's doing; a plain intimation, that none else could do it: none but he could make the stone which the builders refused to become the headstone of the corner; could raise it from the pit into which the hands of its despisers had laid it low, and exalt it to that distinguished place which it now holds, and will for ever hold, in God's spiritual building. Well may we look back with joy and comfort on that marvellous work, whereby the chief corner stone of Zion was laid, and Zion begun to be built upon it; by which we had ground given to build upon, and materials provided for a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Had not *he* risen from the dead, whose resurrection we have been so happily commemorating, we should have had no solid ground to build the least hope upon; we should have perished in our sins, and been swept away like houses built on the sand, in one common torrent of destruction. If Christ had not risen, as his apostle justly argues, we should have had neither place for faith, nor room for preaching. "Our preaching would have been vain, your faith would have been vain also," all had been vain, and come to nothing. The resurrection of Christ was the great bulwark of the Christian faith, the all-conquering weapon, that fought its way through the enemies strongest batteries, and established the truth of the gospel on a firm and solid basis; so that if we regard our religion as we ought, and put a proper value on the innumerable blessings of our holy faith, we have reason to be thankful for that miraculous display of almighty power in the resurrection of Christ, which first gave life to the Christian cause, and diffused the enlightening

ening beams of the sun of righteousness, even to our remote region of the world.

But besides this most clear and obvious cause of our thanksgiving, it is by the resurrection of Jesus, that we are assured of the justification of our persons, and that the sacrifice of Christ has been accepted by God, as “a full, perfect, and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.” By the death of Christ, we know that he paid the debt which was due to sin; and by his resurrection we are assured, that the payment has been acknowledged, and a discharge granted to us, in the person of our redeeming Surety. “Who then,” says the apostle very justly, “shall lay any thing 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.” Indeed his being delivered for our offences would have done us no good, if he had not also been raised for our justification. And it is by his rising, that we are made just and holy; from this stone being made the head of the corner, “we are made lively stones, and built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

Here then, let all sincere Christians survey with pleasure the rock that supports them, gratefully acknowledge the strength and firmness they derive from it, and point it out to others, as the only solid-ground of comfort which the feeble heart of man can rest upon. In that joyful event, which the festival of Easter brings to our remembrance, we behold a sure foundation laid, whereon we may venture all our hopes, and raise the fairest prospect of everlasting happiness. That glorious resurrection which it commemorates,
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is a clear evidence of the redemption of our bodies from the captivity of the grave, and of a future and eternal life, both to soul and body, in consequence of that redemption. Accordingly, when the Redeemer laid down his life, it was for us ; and when he took up his own again, he took up ours also. We are the members of that body, of which he is the head ; and if the head be risen, the members must in due time expect to rise also. The resurrection of Christ is the source and spring, the seed and principle of ours. “ Now is “ Christ risen from the dead,” says the apostle, “ and become “ the first-fruits of them that slept ;” and lest this should seem so strange, as to exceed all belief, he adds, “ For since “ by *man* came death, by *man* came also the resurrec- “ tion of the dead.” If then it be asked, can the resurrection of one, near two thousand years ago, be the cause of our rising ? it may be answered, why not ; as well as the death of one, near six thousand years ago, be the cause of our dying ? the ground and reason of the thing, is the same in both cases. Adam fell, and became the first-fruits of them that die ; Christ rose, and became the first-fruits of them that live ; for though they sleep, still they live. These then are the two persons who are the distinguished authors of the two most important matters in this world, life and death. They are the two heads, from which their two respective bodies derive these different qualities. They that die are Adam’s, and they that sleep and shall rise are Christ’s. Weakness is the cause of death, and raising to life must be the effect of power. Shall then weakness have more ability to hurt us, than power has to do us good ? shall Adam who is but a living soul, affect us more strongly than Christ, who is a quickening spirit ? shall he who is but from the earth, earthy, have a greater influence on our nature than he, who is the Lord
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from heaven? Is it to be supposed, that earth can do that, which heaven cannot undo? 'Tis in this strong, convincing manner, that St. Paul establishes the truth of a resurrection, and exhibits a chain of the most powerful motives to make us thank the Lord, for giving us such timely warning of it; in consequence of which, every true christian may say, as David long since said, in the person of Christ, "wherefore
 "my heart was glad, and my glory rejoiced, because my flesh
 "also shall rest in hope." But where the heart is glad, and the spirit rejoices, some outward and decent expressions of all this inward joy may justly be expected. It is but dissimulated joy, where all is outward; it is but imperfect gladness where all is within. If therefore we are duly sensible of the greatness of that deliverance, the thoughts of which are so agreeably revived in our minds by every return of the late happy Festival, surely the joy and gladness of our hearts will not be confined within, but will break forth in thanks and praise to the God of our salvation, not in private only, but publicly also, in the assemblies of his people.

Such has been the practice of God's faithful people in all ages of the world, to celebrate any signal mercy or joyful deliverance, by some solemn act of praise, some public acknowledgement of the goodness of the great deliverer. Thus when the waters of the destroying flood were withdrawn from the face of the earth, the first thing Noah did, at his leaving the ark, was to erect an altar for a monument of the divine mercy, and there to offer the sacrifice of praise, which God had promised to accept. For the same pious purpose, we are told, the father of the faithful built an altar to Jehovah, as soon as he had received the assurance of that promised seed, who was to come of him, and to be a blessing to all nations. So when the accomplishment of that gracious
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promise drew near, and was announced by the birth of John the Baptist, his father's tongue was no sooner loosed, than he broke out into a joyful hymn of praise, with a "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people." And when the virgin mother of this blessed Redeemer found herself so highly favoured of God, she too expressed her sense of this distinguishing honour, by saying, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." So happy a proof does she exhibit of that connection, which, I think, ought always to take place, between magnifying and praising the Lord in an outward manner, and inwardly rejoicing in him, as a Saviour. And so properly are we excited by these pious examples, to make every season of spiritual joy, a season of thanksgiving likewise. The one, you see, naturally leads to the other, and those holy joys which religion inspires, are intended to lift up our hearts to him from whom they all proceed. Hence it is, that the psalmist, in another of his admirable compositions on this subject, after asking this question, "What reward shall I give unto the Lord, for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" immediately answers, "I will receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord; I will pay my vows now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord's house," in the midst of them who thus assemble to praise the Lord.

It is thus, that the Church of Christ has ever celebrated the appointed anniversary of his glorious resurrection, by taking the eucharistic symbols of his dying love, and in virtue of that commemorative sacrifice, calling on the Lord, by that adorable name through which alone there is salvation for man. On that solemn occasion, we have been lately
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lifting up our hearts unto the Lord, and acknowledging that "it is meet and right to give thanks unto our Lord God," for all the mercies of redeeming love, but especially for giving his blessed Son, and our only Saviour Jesus Christ, not only to die and rise again for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance, the nourishment of our souls, and a principle of life and immortality to our whole frame. This is that truly venerable institution, which may justly be called the glory of Christianity, the distinguishing badge of our holy profession, that most sublime act of religious adoration, the proper, and peculiar worship of Christians, in which we are allowed to plead, in the most powerful manner, these merits, and that mediation for ourselves, which alone can render us, and our imperfect services acceptable in the sight of Almighty God. Surely this is a privilege, perfectly suited to all the wants and weaknesses of our nature, and therefore worthy of our most exalted praise. For what people under the sun, but we Christians, can pretend to such a distinguishing honour from the God whom they worship, or rather from the idol which their vain imaginations have set up in place of the true God? What are all the impure rites, and unaccountable ceremonies of the idolatrous nations, but so many idle compositions of pageantry and ridicule, corrupting the morals, debasing the character, and even painful to the feelings of mankind? But in this pure and holy institution, which constitutes the peculiar glory of our worship, there is such a happy mixture of love and compassion on God's part, meeting with the profoundest gratitude and humility on ours, such an enlivening display of divine mercy, animating our hearts with thankfulness and obedience, that it far surpasses every device of human reason, and justly challenges our highest esteem and veneration. Shall we not then express our de-

vout sense of this inestimable blessing in the most sincere and fervent manner? Shall not our hearts pour out their warmest thanks and praise to our Almighty benefactor, on every return of that blessed solemnity, which calls us, at once, to commemorate the death, and celebrate the resurrection, of the Lord of life and glory? Happy indeed should we think ourselves, in the contemplation of that grand and encouraging prospect, which this holy season opens to the eye of our faith, inviting us to behold at one view the beloved Son of God, doing and suffering the will, and receiving the approbation of his heavenly father, dying and rising again for our salvation, and thus accomplishing the whole counsel of God, and fulfilling all righteousness for man. Surely on such an occasion, nothing can become us better than with joyful hearts to approach the sanctuary of our God, and say with his devout servant of old, "Open the gates of righteousness, that we may go in to them, and give thanks unto the Lord."

The having such an opportunity of entering the place which is distinguished by this expressive title, "the gates of righteousness," must undoubtedly lay us under another powerful obligation to give thanks to that Lord, who has blessed us with such an inestimable privilege; a privilege, which we cannot sufficiently value, nor indeed properly understand, without attending to the true meaning and just application of the word *righteousness*, which so often occurs in the language of scripture, and always refers to something, with which the people of God are very nearly concerned. The word in its original form evidently points to what we call *right*, the person, title or thing, in which there is no defect, and which when weighed in the balance is not found wanting. In this sense we often find the word applied to the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, as promised in the
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Old Testament, and manifested in the New, and who is very properly distinguished as *the righteous one*, that is, the person in whom the *right* is, just as we say the righteous, or *rightful* heir, he that has a *right*, a clear, undoubted, inherent right to the inheritance. And to whom can this title be applied with stricter justice and propriety, than to that only begotten and well-beloved Son, who, we are assured, is appointed heir of all things, by whom, and for whom all things were created; and from him therefore all his creatures derive whatever *right* they have, by divine promise, either to the grace and favour of God here, or to the kingdom of heaven hereafter. Such is his title to be distinguished by the word *righteousness*, if by it we understand the possession of *right*, to whatever privilege the subject or context directs our thoughts.

But I know, the more common acceptation of this word, as including in it the idea of law, justice, or equity, leads us to understand by *righteousness* whatever is conformable to the law or will, the statutes, judgments, or ordinances of God. In which sense also, Jesus Christ, our incarnate God, is very properly called by the name of *righteousness*, in as much as he is himself the living law, the source of all that is called order and rectitude among the works of God. So that every outward statute or institution revealed and delivered by God, at sundry times and in divers manners, to the sons of men, was but a transcript of that original law, which lives for ever in the heart of Christ, who is the source and fountain from whence all that is really and truly righteous must and does perpetually proceed. No wonder then, that the scriptures so often distinguish him as the just and *righteous one*, who was to execute judgment and justice in the earth, first to save, and then to judge, the world in righteousness.

ness. So then the "gates of righteousness," mentioned in my text, are *his* gates, "the gates of the *righteous one*," as the passage might as well be rendered, where he has promised to be present with those that are gathered together in his righteous name, regularly convened and called, in consequence of authority derived from him, and agreeably to the rules which he has prescribed, for the service, confession, and glory of his name.

If then we are so happy as to enjoy this privilege, in the only way in which it can be rightly enjoyed, the way of Christ's own appointment, and to which he has been pleased to annex his blessing and approbation, surely we cannot but see the obligation we lie under to embrace with pleasure every such regular opportunity of assembling in his name, and appearing in the presence of that gracious Lord, who has blessed us with these "gates of righteousness," that we may go in to them for this very purpose, to give thanks unto this Lord, or as it is expressed in another psalm, "to praise him in his name JAH," the very name which is here used, and rejoice before him? Thus imitating the song of Moses, and of the children of Israel, when they said of this same divine person JAH, "he is my strength and my song, and is become my salvation," or my JESUS. This is *he*, whom we peculiarly acknowledge as *our Lord*, in that public hymn of praise, wherein, with the apostles, prophets and martyrs, and with the holy Church throughout all the world, we address ourselves to Christ the King of glory, and say to him with joyful hearts, "We praise thee, as God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord."

What comfort and satisfaction then must all true Christians feel, in approaching those gates of righteousness, in
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which their Lord is praised, and acknowledged to be the author and finisher of their faith, the father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift proceedeth, and to whom all glory and honour ought to be returned. It is only by looking up to him in that character, and behaving as becomes such a state of entire dependence on his mercy and goodness, that we can ever hope for admission to that high and holy place where he dwells in heaven, and as a preparation for that exalted state of happiness, to be allowed to tread his courts here on earth, and be numbered among those righteous persons, who are invited to "come before his presence with thanksgiving, and to shew themselves glad in him with psalms." For so, immediately after the psalmist calls to open the gates of righteousness, that he may go in to them, the answer is made, "This is the gate of the Lord, the *righteous* shall enter into it." Thereby shewing how proper and becoming it is, that those who wish to enter the gate of the righteous Lord, should themselves be righteous, and fit to appear in his holy presence.

But is this really an encouragement to our appearing before him, the consideration of his perfect holiness, and our reflecting on this infallible truth, that "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and will only behold the thing that is just?" Can it be supposed that the righteousness of man, a frail and fallen creature, will bear to be tried by the rule of God's perfection, or examined in the pure and spotless light of that all-piercing knowledge, which distinguishes the glorious Creator? How then can the opening the gates of his righteousness hold out any encouragement to our entering in to them, with all our defects and imperfections about us, or any inducement to our giving thanks for being admitted

mitted to a place, which seems to be so unsuitable to us?

Such no doubt would be the effect of contemplating the perfect righteousness of God, as inherent in, and essential to his divine nature. But if the redeeming person in Jehovah, "God manifested in the flesh," has been graciously pleased to represent himself, as clothed with this perfection of righteous, in a relative capacity, and with a view of communicating the benefits of it to the objects of his redemption, then the prospect becomes more inviting, and we begin to see some reason for our rejoicing in, and giving thanks to our Lord for, that very righteousness of his, which, instead of keeping us at an awful distance from him, is intended to bring us always nearer and nearer to him, that so at last we may be happy with him for ever, and "filled with the fruits of his righteousness, to the eternal praise and glory of God."

From viewing the matter in this light, it has been justly observed, that among all the various titles, by which the Saviour of the world is distinguished in the sacred history, none are more significant, or more endearing, than those abstract words by which he is so often delineated, as expressive of the several branches of his mediatorial office. Thus an inspired prophet styles him "the Lord our righteousness," and St. Paul, with his usual elegance, enlarges the description, and tells us that Christ is made unto us of God wisdom, "and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Yet how could he have been *made* all these unto *us*, if he had not been *made man*? How should he be distinguished as *our* righteousness, unless he was pleased to put himself in *our* place, to assume *our* nature, and be like *us*, in all things, sin only excepted? This indeed would give us a title to share
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in his righteousness, to partake of those glories and excellencies, which he has purchased for, and bestowed upon our nature, by taking it on himself, and uniting it to his deity. Such was the scheme of divine mercy, laid down at the creation of the world, a scheme which the angels desired to look into; and when they looked, could see no other righteousness for man, but the righteousness of God in Christ. Indeed man soon fell from his original righteousness, and showed, that of his own nature he was inclined to nothing but evil. Then it was, that the necessity of a Redeemer appeared in a clearer light; and the whole creation, groaning under the weight of sin, proclaimed this awful truth, that what man lost in Adam, Christ alone could restore; that as in the former all died, so in the latter should all be made alive; dead unto sin, but alive again unto righteousness.

Such was the plan of restoration held forth to all who would embrace, and comply with it, as the means of salvation and happiness. And in the execution of this merciful plan, our righteous Lord is ever intent on the great work for which he came into this world; ever ready to bestow the blessed fruits of that glorious work on all those who sincerely seek his kingdom, and long to partake of his righteousness. For this purpose he has founded a Church, blessed it with the means of grace and holiness, and promised to be with the regular administration of these means, and the administrators of them, to the end of the world. In that humble part of his Church, to which we belong, though permitted for a while to fall into a low and depressed situation, yet under all that restraint which was thought necessary to be laid upon us, we have experienced such seasonable support from the great King and Head of the Church, as gives

us good ground to apply to ourselves the accomplishment of that gracious promise, which he made long ago to his faithful people, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but "with great mercies will I *gather* thee." And no greater mercy or blessing can we look for in this world, than to be thus *gathered* together in his name, under a due regard to the authority which he left with his Church, and in a humble dependence on the assurance of his sanctifying presence, to render our services in the sanctuary here below acceptable to that high and holy One, for whose praise and glory we are thus assembled.

There is nothing, I suppose, on this earth, that can be conceived so like to what is to be seen in heaven, as a congregation of pious and devout Christians, called together for the worship of their God, and having their Almighty Redeemer present by his power and spirit among them, receiving from him the most engaging pledges of his grace and favour, and therefore devoting themselves, their spirits, souls, and bodies, to his service and obedience, professing their faith and hope and trust in him; their absolute and entire dependence upon him; and with every feature composed, every gesture serious and suitable to the place where they are, lifting up their hearts and voices to sing the praises of their God and Saviour, and acknowledge the manifold instances of his tender mercy, and loving kindness towards them. If this be not a truly pleasant, and delightful employment, there is nothing in which we can be employed in this world that deserves to be called so. If this be not a gratification suited to the noblest faculties of the human mind, it is surely capable of none other. And he who can taste and enjoy this heartfelt delight, this pure and unmixed satisfaction, will be always ready to express his just and grateful

grateful sense of such an inestimable privilege, ever calling, in the sincere desire of his heart, to “open to him the gates “ of righteousness, that he may go in to them, and give “ thanks unto the Lord.”

Such, I trust, is the pious wish, and fervent desire of every member of this congregation: And now that these “gates “ of righteousness” into which we have entered this day for the first time, have been opened in a new and more commodious manner than heretofore, let me hope that your piety and devotion will be renewed also, and that the very appearance of this house will excite a sentiment of respect and reverence in every one who enters it, and make him say within himself, as the holy Patriarch said of old, “Surely this is “ the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” I know it may be said, that God has been served, and may be served acceptably in any house, whether it be in the form of a Church or not; and it is very true, that he may be so served, served in a very acceptable manner, without a Church, when it is not in our power to have one. When Christians are either not able, or not allowed to provide proper houses for the public worship of God, he no doubt will graciously accept of that service, when thus necessarily performed in a private and less expensive manner. But that is no good reason, why privacy should be consulted, or expence should be spared, when neither ability nor permission are wanting, to make the sanctuary of God appear like what it should be, in order to produce reverence in those who draw near to it.

The nature of man is such, that his religion, like himself, must have, as it were, both a body and a soul; that is, it must be external, as well as internal: and his devotion accordingly will be either depressed by the sordid, dispiriting circumstances

circumstances connected with it, or heightened by the goodly and animating appearance of the objects around him. From the manner in which you have lately exerted yourselves, it is evident that you wish, as far as you are able, to give religion this noble and becoming advantage: and I have no doubt but the same generous efforts will be displayed in doing what you can to uphold and preserve this house, to the pious purpose for which it has been erected, and to support the divine service, which, I pray, may be long and happily continued in it.

For this purpose, let me beg of you all to be regular and devout in your attendance on the ordinances of this sanctuary, and as often as God is pleased to open them to you, hearken to the invitation of his holy psalmist, "O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." If they are the gates of *righteousness*, which you are permitted to enter, remember, I beseech you, what you owe to the *righteous One*, who has blessed you with this precious privilege, and let it be your constant study and endeavour to "take heed unto that which is right," in all your ways. But nothing can be more meet and *right*, and your bounden duty, than that you should be ever ready, in this place, to offer up your hearty thanks, as well as your humble prayers, to the God of your salvation, the author and giver of all your good things: and may He be ever ready to hear in heaven his dwelling place, and graciously accept both your praises and your prayers, for the sake of him, whom he heareth always, Jesus Christ the righteous; to whom, in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit, let us ascribe, as is most due, all glory and honour, thanksgiving and praise, this day, and for evermore. Amen.

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