

REMARKS OF A.J. HAZELTINE

At dedication of the new church March 5, 1926 (2)

As I understand it, I am to say something, - not much, in reference to the aspirations, hopes and fears of the membership of the First Baptist Church of Warren, during the last fifty-five years or about that length of time since I became a member - a sort of back number of the series.

Altho I believe more zeal and stimulation can be engendered by the forward look than the look backward, yet we often get much profit from the latter, as through it we may avoid many mistakes.

You will pardon me, I know, if what is said should be rather disjointed, - a hotch poch of sundry ingredients, - a little of philosophy amongst it. I have often thought of duty, - not the harsh puritanical kind, - but duty done cheerfully and willingly, as the foundation of happiness, and who does not want to be happy! Daniel Webster said: - "There is no evil that we cannot face or fly from but the consciousness of duty disregarded. A sense of duty pursues us ever. It is omnipresent like the Deity. If we take to ourselves the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the Seas, duty performed or duty violated, is still with us, for our happiness or misery. If we shall say the darkness shall cover us, in the darkness as in the light our obligations are yet with us. We cannot escape their power, nor fly from their presence. They are with us in this life, will be with us at its close, and in that scene of indescribable solemnity, which is yet further onward, we shall still find ourselves surrounded by the consciousness of duty, to pain us whenever it has been violated, and to console us so far as God may have given us the grace to perform it."

God loves to see His creatures happy! Our lawful delight is His! They know not God who think to please Him with making themselves miserable.

Dickens has said: "Without strong affection and humility of heart, and gratitude to that Being whose code of mercy and whose great attribute is benevolence to all that breathe, true happiness cannot be attained."

And, we must not be selfish in our pursuit of happiness. Such pursuit must be rational and unselfish.

Hawthorne says: "Happiness comes incidentally. Make it the object of pursuit and it leads us a wild goose chase and is never attained. Follow some other object and very likely we may find that we have caught happiness without dreaming of it."

I would add that our happiness is increased by what we can take away from the wretchedness of others, in whatever way we may do it, - whether it be the cup of cold water to the thirsty one, or other physical needs, - the pleasant greeting and handshake, or whatever. Or, as Coleridge says: "The happiness of life is made up of minute fractions, the little soon-forgotten charities of a smile, a kind look, a heartfelt compliment, and the countless other infinitesimals of pleasant thought and feeling."

If, therefore, it has been our duty in the pursuit of happiness to seek another object, abandoning the direct for the indirect, then should not we, the members of the old First Baptist Church of Warren and the loyal membership of its congregation, be very happy when our efforts have become fruitful, and even we can now dedicate this new church building to the service of Him who came to bring light unto the world!

May 2d next will be the 92d birthday. You have been often told of the early history of the church and of its struggles, which, however high its ambitions, was obliged to creep before it could walk, and cut its garment according to the cloth. While we are all glad, I am sure, that the day of small salaries, with a donation for the pastor, is a thing of the past,- yet we must remember the hardships of the people of earlier days, when money was scarce and much of the business transacted was through exchange of commodities, or barter. Doubtless, many small and weak churches were saved for the future by these old methods, and as well as by the aid received from the Northern Baptist Convention,- which organization shows what pulling together and reciprocity can do,- as for many years now we have as a Church been helping weaker ones, as we had gotten beyond the need of this beneficent assistance. This is Pauline doctrine, that the strong should help the weaker ones.

And, now what can I say as to the earlier and older members, those who endured hardships in the early days and who are gone, and those who are still with us and equally loyal.

When we first attended the Mid-Week Prayer Service, Deacon and Mrs Norman Snyder, Deacon and Mrs A. Gerould, Deacon and Mrs S.G. Waid, Mrs Alden and Mrs Page were usually present. Deacon Loree came from his farm, sometimes. There were doubtless, occasionally, others,- but very few indeed. Mrs Page, only, of those just mentioned is living today.

In 1876, Mrs C.M.Snyder and family came to Warren to live, their coming being a great encouragement. Mrs Snyder being a Baptist Pastor's widow, and by natural endowment eminently equipped for leadership in Missionary, Bible School and kindred Church activities, became a source of much strength. Mrs Snyder, later, had the great satisfaction of seeing her four daughters become members by baptism.

Of the household of Deacon and Mrs G.W. Thompson, who came to us in ---, we are still blessed,- greatly so,- by the presence at most of our services of the father, mother and daughter. They always have been and are a great blessing to us.

We have many other members of outstanding loyalty, liberality and other excellent virtues, but it is impossible,- you see,- for me to mention them.

Mrs Hazeltine and I became members by letter, December 31, 1870.

Rev. I Trowbridge came soon after, as the first pastor after our affiliation, and was loved by the members for his sweet spirit and devoted service..

So far as the physical upbuilding is concerned, we must first mention the Pastorate of that grand old man, Rev. B.C.Willoughby, from 1857 to 1862. He it was who led the forces who bought our old church building and had it removed and re-erected.

We mention next the pastorate of that old wheel-horse, Rev. Dr. E.F.Crane, everyone's friend, in 1877-78, when a gallery, new windows, and other improvements were made.

The next time important changes and new construction were to be entered upon, was during the Pastorate of Rev. W.J.Coulston, but not fully completed until 1892, when Rev. W.C. King was the minister. At this time, the front vestibule,- non-artistic but serviceable, was added; also the large Bible School, Prayer Meeting Room, Kitchen and Dining Rooms were erected, and all dedicated, Dr P.S.Henson of Chicago delivering the dedicatory sermon.

The next and most important, and which has been prayed for and thought about so long, is now what you see around you,- the altogether new and beautiful First Baptist Church, erected by the membership and its friends, under the Pastorate of Rev. Harold F. Stoddard, whose leadership, I am sure, we all hope will continue for many a year.

While we are all proud of the new church building and its equipment, which is perfectly proper, let us give ourselves the minor credit, remembering that the major part of our success comes by the grace of our great leader, Jesus the Nazarine, who taught humility, both by his life and speech.

And, another thing! It will not do to regard the hard work and sacrifice as completed, - and I use sacrifice in its best tense, which should be for the future,- as a cheerful offering of that we are capable of doing to make the new equipment of the utmost in advancing that cause we so much love.

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