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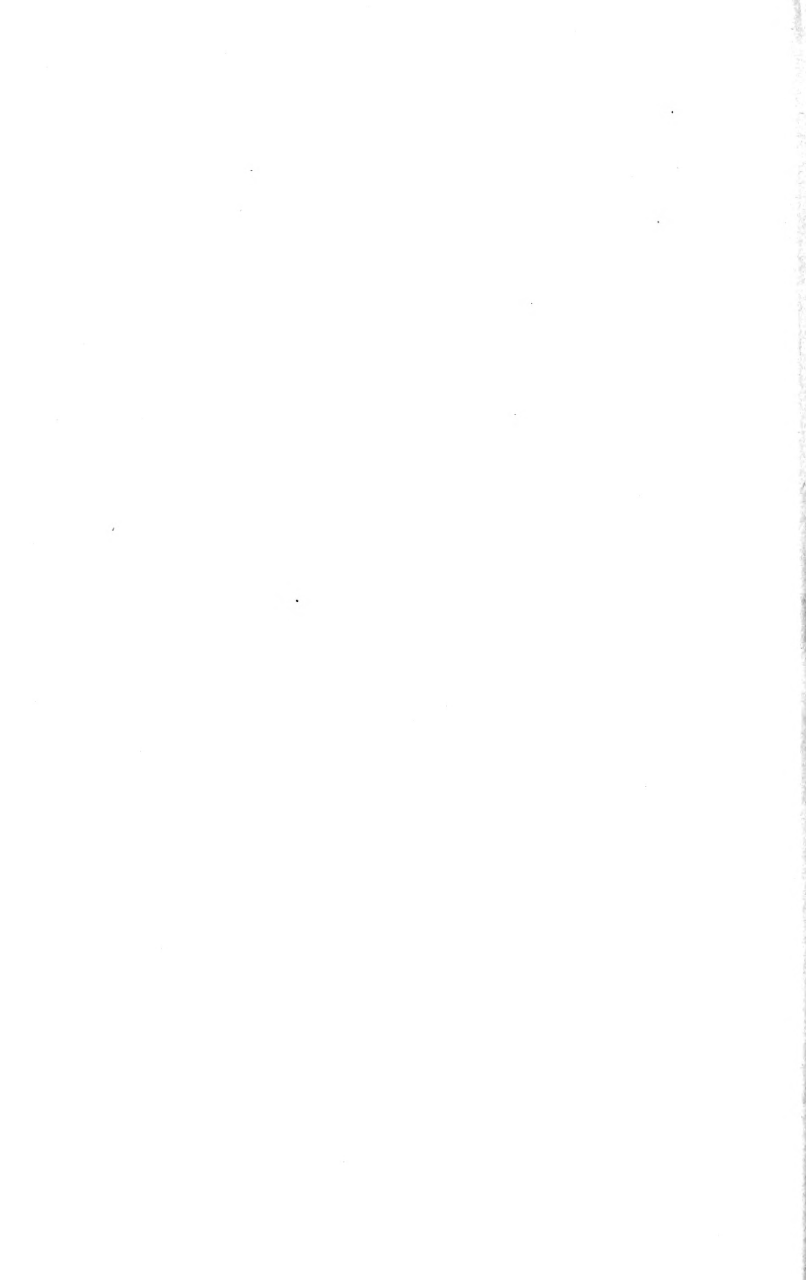




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51
DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

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A SERMON,

PREACHED IN GRACE CHURCH,

ORANGE, N. J.,

EASTER, APRIL 16, 1865,

BY THE RECTOR,

JAMES S. BUSH, M. A.

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A SERMON.

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words : Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did, by Him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know : Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain : whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it.”—Acts ii. 22, 23, 24.

DEATH and the Resurrection! Mysterious opposites, brought together by the will of God! The mourner's grief and the mourner's hope! The symbols of the twain are intertwined to-day in the house of God. The union is not a strange one. Easter flowers for many ages have decked the graves of loved ones departed. We are pleased when they meet the eye, beside the forms that Death has claimed for his own. For they tell of a power mightier even than Death. But they cannot blind the eye to the present fact of death. And to-day, the remembrance of this is forced upon us, even in the midst of our rejoicings as the disciples of a risen Saviour. The pall of sorrow is thrown over Font and Altar, and fitly so, for both tell us, first of death—of the death of Jesus—of the death of those mortal bodies—of the death of the body of sin. We are baptized into His death, and the truth thus beheld in symbol, is one that fills the heart with grief, that our sins should make His death the saddest fact in the world's history. The altar too, tells us first of the cross of Calvary, and of Him who by wicked hands was crucified and slain. To make the memorial of His death, and the confession of our sins that caused it, we kneel around it, often with tears, not only of sympathy, but with tears of contrition.

Is this, then, the sum of our solemn sacramental service? Is this the only meaning that we gather from these symbols

of our faith in Christ? A sad religion, indeed, were ours, if this were all its teachings. A life that no mortal could bear, were ours, as the disciples *only*, of a *crucified* Saviour. For it were a life without hope, ay, and a life without God, in the world. But "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Font and Altar tell together, another story than the death of sin, and the death of Jesus. We are baptized, indeed, into Christ, even into His death, and with Him, the man of sin is buried in the waters of baptism. But through the grave and gate of death, it is the blessed portion of the believer to pass with Him, to a joyful resurrection. The sad memorial we make of His crucifixion, tells besides to the believing heart, of the sins that were nailed with Him to the cross; and the Body and Blood of the dying victim, become, through faith, the very food and sustenance of our risen life,—the precious pledge that this life shall never die, but be renewed and glorified, by the mighty power of God.

Fitly, then, above these signs of mourning, the symbols of this risen life are seen to spring. Fitly, on the very ashes of the departed, moistened as they are and must be, with our tears, do we rear the memorial of the Christian's hope. And to-day, as always, when stricken by the hand of God, do we send up to Him, from crushed and bleeding hearts, the Christian's prayer of faith. O my brother, mystery though it be, and impossible to him who is not sustained by the faith of the Gospel of Jesus, this commingling of tears of wo and fears of joy is, indeed, the truest as it may become the most blessed experience in the life of mortals. It is no contradiction to the truth that we see before us. It is no contradiction to the facts of our mortal life. It is no contradiction to our nature, which God hath made so keenly alive to this our double portion of joy and sorrow. He who made us to weep, made us also to rejoice; and it is the precious truth of His Word that the one shall become the means of a profounder and more abiding experience of

the other. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. And he that now goeth on his way weeping shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him."

This is why, beloved, we do not give up our Easter flowers to-day, but wreath them even around the garments of our mourning; that thoughts not only of death and the grave may be ours, but thoughts beside of a blessed resurrection—that the remembrance may be ours, not alone of what wicked hands and hellish hate have done, but the grateful remembrance of what wicked hands and hellish hate have not done, and can never do through the mercy of God. We mingle to-day as never before, the tokens of a nation's grief, with the expressions of the brightest hopes and the deepest joys, that we solemnize in our Christian year; and the gladness of our Easter anthem is chastened into notes of sorrow, such as we could feel to be fitting under scarce another dispensation of Providence. No private sorrow, no lesser grief, could have caused this seeming departure from the custom hallowed by so many ages and so many joyous associations. But in the midst of these marks of sorrow, we cling to the comforting signs of the Christian faith, with which God Himself through a risen Saviour hath been pleased to cheer us. It is the lesson of the resurrection that we teach to the mourner in the last sad office for the dead; and the parting word of inspiration, following as it does the precious ministrations of hope, is the glad assurance of victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We will not surrender, then, a single thought nor a single sign which our Holy Festival doth offer for the strengthening of our hope, and the confirmation of our faith. The very words of our anthem exhort us to the cherishing of all that is so given us, and all that we so much need in this vale of tears. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. *Therefore*, let us keep the feast." The world needed that greatest sacrifice, and the world should mourn for the sins which caused it. But the world rejoices in the unspeakable blessings of life and immortality which that sacrifice ushered in. And I believe

that, deeply as the nation and the civilized world will deplore the sacrifice of that good man whom God had placed over us, it will yet be found that the offering up of this life—the most valuable, and at the present time, as it seemed, the most needful to our future—will be blessed to the nation's weal, through a deeper abhorrence of the sins which compassed his death, a profounder reverence for the authority of those whom God hath placed over us, by a truer respect for the virtues of goodness and gentleness, allied with courage and firmness, and all blended together in the purest patriotism, which so eminently distinguished our lamented President. Be assured, my brethren, as that great and good man did not *live* in vain, so he has not *died* in vain. Death is cruel, and we stand aghast in the presence of its mighty power. But there is something stronger than death. The life of God is stronger—His truth and His righteousness are stronger. And these, as illustrated in the deeds of the departed, will not be buried with his mortal body.

We sorrow not, therefore, over his fall, as those that have no hope. We *have* hope in his *death*—hope for the memory that will be precious in the hearts of his countrymen, enshrined there in holy fellowship with that other name revered from the nation's birth—the Father of his country. We have hope for the future of our beloved land—that the carnival of blood and murder is drawing near its end. Instead of finding in the event that saddens us, the material for our fears, and distrusting the Providence that has stricken us in the midst of our rejoicings, I read even in this our chastisement, the revelation of the righteous will of God, for a surer foundation still of the strength and glory of the Republic. Treason has done its work, and treason has rung in the nation's capital its own death-knell. Come what may, no good man throughout the world can now disguise from himself the malignity and hellish atrocity of this rebellion. Murderers may still band themselves together for a time, but their work of malice is now done, and the work of repentance is begun, even in those who have stood by in times

past irresolute and indifferent to the issue. Though not, perhaps, as we would bring it, yet in the better way that God shall appoint, peace to our bleeding country will come—a peace in which all true hearts will rejoice, and unite hereafter in maintaining forever. The fellowship of grief will bring together brothers who have been sundered by the petty strifes of partisan contention. And they who have submitted their cause to the wager of battle in the honest belief that the right was theirs, will now abide the issue which God hath so manifestly determined.

Let us not forget, brethren, that the destinies of our land are in the hands of a God who does not hate, but loves us, and desires only in all the troubles that He brings upon us, to draw us to a truer allegiance to Himself as a righteous and a loving Sovereign. The manifestations of His will that our chastening is not for our destruction, but our regeneration, are unmistakable. The baptism of blood, so much more awful than we had thought possible, will be followed by a resurrection, not to the glory of a life that is only one of material prosperity, and, therefore, of itself a career of corruption and decay, but that other glory which comes to the nation as to the individual by the power of faith in God, as a God of Justice, of Mercy and of Truth. We have learned much by our sorrows. The nation's discipline will purify its own peculiar life, and will be felt, too, with cleansing efficacy by the Church of Christ.

It was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, that Jesus of Nazareth was taken from this earthly life of goodness, and by wicked hands was crucified and slain. It was part of the wisdom of God in a mystery, that the death of Jesus should be allowed. God knew the resurrection that would follow, and the mighty power of that resurrection in extending the gospel of Christ throughout the world. Everywhere, when the story of His death was told, and the power of this new life made manifest by the Apostles' preaching, men were pricked in the heart and turned by thousands to the truths of the gospel, and the knowledge of salvation

through the blood of Jesus. I read in this fact, the meaning of the event we deplore, and I ground upon it the firmest hopes for the salvation of our country, through the same truths of the gospel of Christ.

The President was an instrument in the hands of God. Faithfully and wisely, he discharged the duties of his office. Malice will hide its head in shame, and the voice of Detraction will be struck dumb in the grateful remembrance of his virtues. But his earthly career, though cut short by the hand of violence, was continued as long, as in the course of God's wisdom it was required. The death of Jesus was needed, to close *His* career of holiness: so we have reason to believe for similar ends, was the death of President Lincoln decreed. We call it untimely. But our times are in God's hands. He is the disposer of life and death, and all the events of earth. In His hands, let us be content to trust ourselves, our lives and our eternal destinies, the life and the destiny of the nation, with all the affairs of earth and time, believing in Him, giving thanks unto Him, and hoping in Him for the life that now is, and that which is to come.



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