

LESSONS FROM AN ANCIENT FAST.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

CITADEL SQUARE CHURCH

CHARLESTON, S. C.,

On the occasion of the General Fast.

THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 1861,

BY

REV. J. R. KENDRICK.

CHARLESTON:

STEAM-POWER PRESSES OF EVANS & COGSWELL.

No. 3 Broad and 103 East Bay Streets.

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Charleston, June 14, 1861.

Rev. J. R. KENDRICK.

Dear Sir—At a meeting of the congregation of the Citadel Square Church, held on Thursday last, the 13th instant, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to solicit of you a copy of your Sermon, delivered on the occasion of the day set apart by the President of the Confederate States of America, as a day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, which the undersigned request you to furnish at your earliest convenience, with a view of having the same published for general distribution.

Very respectfully,

JAMES L. GANTT,
S. WYATT,
GEO. W. OLNEY,

Committee.

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DISCOURSE.

“Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Abava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He was entreated of us.”—Ezra viii, 21-3.

The successive ages, in their histories, are much like concentric circles, ever increasing in number, ever expanding, but ever preserving a fixed resemblance to each other. The last is like the first, only larger, bolder and more imposing; the first is like the last, the model and prophecy of all that come after. The movements and destinies of insignificant peoples and societies in the world's infancy, proceeded upon principles and were developed in accordance with laws which govern the grander movements and destinies of the mighty nations existing at this hour. The whole future oak is said to be contained in the acorn, and the first little commonwealth was not merely the germ of all future States and Empires, but their actual type and miniature representative. The statesman is, and must be, a student of history; for there he learns in advance, by tracing in their practical operations and visible results, what are the hidden laws which control human affairs, and to which he should conform his own plans and measures. History has been described as philosophy teaching by examples; it is more exactly, I think, examples

teaching us, if we have the discerning mind, the true philosophy. Especially should the statesman, as well as the humblest citizen, be a diligent student of Biblical history, even though it treat of a people as comparatively small and unimportant as the ancient Jews; for in *their* annals what is most real, vital and permanent in political organizations, appears in sharp contrast with what is accidental, factitious and fleeting. The eternal principles that must underlie and support all vigorous, enduring national life, are there developed, not simply in actual results, but in results sanctioned by divine approval and authenticated by divine inspiration.

Thus the fast of Ezra on the banks of the Ahava, with his little colony of Jewish captives, observed four centuries and a half before Christ's coming, rises into the dignity of an august precedent, to be studied and imitated by our nation, figuring in the latter part of the nineteenth century, with its nine or ten millions of inhabitants, and sustaining vast and complicated relations to the great centres of civilization. The verses describing this fast indicate, if I mistake not, what should be *the end, the principles and the spiritual exercises* of this day's solemnity—a solemnity the most momentous, by far, to which the people comprising these Confederate States were ever summoned.

1. The *end* or *aim* of Ezra's fast is stated in words which happily and forcibly express the purposes contemplated by the present religious service—"to seek of God a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance." And this becomes the more apparent and interesting when we recall the somewhat striking resemblance between Ezra's situation and our own. He was, you are aware, one of those predestined agents, employed in restoring the captives to Jerusalem, and in rebuilding there the dismantled and prostrate Jewish commonwealth. He had been preceded in this service by several distinguished laborers, in particular by Prince Zerubbabel and the High Priest Joshua, who had conducted fifty thousand colonists to their ancestral seats, and had already completed the second temple.

Much had been done; but much remained to do. The settlers at Jerusalem were environed with enemies and exposed to the most serious perils from without, while their internal affairs were in a most disordered and unsatisfactory condition. Ezra, a priest and man of learning, was now on the eve of leading to them an auxiliary force of colonists, with the hope of strengthening their hands, reforming abuses and re-establishing their ancient constitution and laws on a firm basis. It was a critical moment in Jewish history, and it is not extravagant to say that all the future in the destiny of that people might depend on the results of this expedition.

Much like this is our position to-day. We are engaged in an enterprise no less solemn and momentous than the settlement of a reformed and purified Government—the confirmation of our ancient rights and franchises under new guards and guarantees—the assertion of our name and place in the great family of nations, “the Federation of the world.” Much has already been done. As in the case of Ezra, the preliminary steps have all been taken; the new Government has been organized under a Constitution regarded as a great improvement on the old and broken one; and we are now displaying all the signs and discharging all the functions of a vigorous national life. But much remains to do; in one view, everything. We have to hold and make good our high position against a hostile and determined power, denying our every claim, and contesting our every step. The decisive hour, the hour of destiny, seems close at hand.

It was at such a moment that Ezra and his associates, already girded for the march, proclaimed their fast, afflicted their souls, and mingled their penitential tears with the waters of the Ahava. It is at such a moment that we, pausing a little before the conclusive onset, are summoned to abase ourselves before God in all the decent and devout services of this solemn occasion.

As already stated, words could scarcely be framed to convey more exactly what should be the precise pur-

pose of this service, than do those of Ezra—"to seek of God a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance." All these interests are involved in the crisis which faces us, and the enterprise in which we are engaged. *Ourselves, our little ones, and all our substance*—and what is there dear and valuable to the heart, which, either expressly or by necessary implication, this pregnant catalogue does not embrace?—are staked upon the issues of this tremendous contest. As the controversy has turned and now shapes itself, it seems not improbable that it is destined to become a controversy over the rights of property, the altars of religion, the very safety and sanctity of home.

I would have you note in particular, my brethren, what appears to be the central word in Ezra's description of the purpose of his fast. His object was to seek a "*right way*" upon this occasion.

A "*right*" way—that is, most obviously, and according to the common signification and use of this word, a *righteous* way, the way of right, truth and justice. We ought to desire, and I trust *do* desire, from the President of the Confederacy down to the humblest citizen, to discover and tread the high and open path of honor and rectitude. We should wish to avoid false and crooked ways, dark and Machiavellian policies, the diplomacy that cheats and lies, and the statecraft that spurns integrity, and crawls to its ends through the subtleties of fraud and the foulness of dishonor. I have ever shrunk from the sentiment: "Our country, always right; but, right or wrong, always our country." I will not deny, indeed, that it may be a man's duty to cling to his country when she is wrong; but this maxim, as it has commonly been paraded and employed, tends to confuse and obliterate moral distinctions as related to the acts of government, to educate the popular mind to indifference respecting political measures, to deify the flag as the symbol of national greatness, and to blind the eye to all the stains that may deface and degrade it. Let us be deeply solicitous that our country, in one view just born,

just entering upon its career of destiny, may start in the *right* way and always keep it. It is not success only that we ought to desire in the present contest, but success upon just principles, in the employment of honorable expedients, and in the adoption of a policy on which the scrutiny of the Searcher of hearts can honestly be invoked. It is very encouraging, on referring to the Presidential proclamation which has invited us to this service, to read there words almost identical with those which the Jewish leader used in connection with his act of humiliation. The Chief Magistrate requests us to "implore the Lord of Hosts to guide and direct our policy in the paths of right, duty, justice, and mercy." No request, surely, should be more consonant with the views and feelings of a Christian people. Oh, that He who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, may enable our President, our Cabinet, our Congress, and all our people, to discern and choose truth and justice amidst all our temptations and provocations to err, and all the fierce passions and blinding prejudices which the hour is apt to excite! Oh, that He may direct us in the way illuminated with the smile of His own approval!

A "*right way*"—evidently, in this connexion, a *safe and successful way*. This was clearly the wish uppermost in the mind of Ezra, in the use of this word. He was about entering upon a long and weary march across the sands of the desert, where dangers of every sort awaited him, and where bands of freebooting desperadoes might suddenly sweep down upon him, dooming his expedition to a disastrous termination and blighting the hopes or shading the prospects of the feeble colony at Jerusalem. He naturally wished to be defended from enemies, to escape calamities, and without any misadventure to finish his journey in complete success. Beyond question this is the great, common desire, the passionate longing, filling the hearts of the millions of the Confederacy to-day. They wish to touch speedily the goal which they have in view—to avoid the further effusion of blood and obtain a prompt peace—to be successful in battle, if this stern arbitrament must be

accepted—to obtain the recognition of their independent nationality—to reach a condition in which they shall be permitted, without let or hindrance, to rear, strengthen and adorn the fabric of their government on the foundation which has been laid—a condition in which they shall enjoy, fairly and fully, the natural advantages of their soil, climate and system of labor, put in practice, as far as may be, their traditional and favorite notions respecting freedom of trade, develop their own peculiar form of civilization, and work out their own destiny. They wish to establish on these western shores another republic which, though perhaps not distinctly anticipated by the patriot sires of the Revolution, shall still realize their hopes and play its grand part in multiplying the triumphs of commerce, diffusing the blessings of Christianity and promoting the great interests of civilization. Undoubtedly, the primary object of this solemnity is to implore heaven to be propitious to our cause, to pronounce its benediction on our gigantic enterprise, to enlighten our rulers with a wisdom that shall enable them to baffle the counsels of the enemy, and inspire our armies with a courage that shall make their progress a march to victory.

2. Such is the great aim of this solemnity as described in the incident which is guiding our reflections. But our text also happily suggests to our consideration some of those *principles* which underlie our present service, and which we must distinctly apprehend in order that it may be fruitful in good consequences.

Ezra recognized, for example, *his dependence on God* as to the results of his expedition. This is a statement too obviously just to require argument or illustration on its behalf. He was a firm believer in Divine Providence, and calmly committed his enterprise to that custody and direction. Such must we be; so must we do. Our fast proceeds upon the supposition that God's hand is in human affairs, and without this conviction on our part, it will prove a grave and insulting mockery which He may resent with the tokens of His displeasure. If this day, to any

general extent, is regarded as a merely politic appointment, intended to impress *men* simply, and to stimulate confidence by seeming to invest our enterprize with the sanctions of religion and give it the prestige of divine approval, I need scarcely tell you, my brethren, that our fast is in danger of turning to a curse. I dwell on this point for a moment because, though a rudimental one in religion, and too obvious, in this view, to require elaboration, it is still a perpetual stumbling-stone to a certain class of cultivated thinkers, who cannot conceal the sceptical disdain or indifference with which they regard it. That most brilliant and popular of solid writers, that greatest master perhaps of the English tongue, Macaulay, was a representative of this class, and he always alluded to this vital doctrine of Christian faith in a cold and sneering tone. In speaking of the voyage of William to the British shores, he uses the following language: "The weather had indeed served the Protestant cause so well that some men of more piety than judgment fully believed the ordinary laws of nature to have been suspended for the preservation of the liberty and religion of England. Exactly a hundred years before, they said, the Armada, invincible by man, had been scattered by the wrath of God. Civil freedom and divine truth were again in jeopardy; and again the obedient elements had fought for the good cause. The wind had blown strong from the east while the Prince wished to sail down the channel, had turned to the south when he wished to enter Torbay, had sunk to a calm during the disembarkation, and, as soon as the disembarkation was completed, had risen to a storm and had met the pursuers in the face." It is impossible to mistake the purport of this passage, especially when taken in connection with many of a similar character in this great author's works. While caricaturing the doctrine of Providence as held by intelligent believers, its effect is to bring that precious article of our faith into suspicion and discredit, to ridicule the idea that "the obedient elements may fight for the good cause," and that "the wrath of God" may justly be

relied on to scatter fleets "invincible by man." It is to be hoped that the subtle poison of this pernicious scepticism does not circulate widely among our people. The very foundation principle on which this solemnity rests is the control of Jehovah over human affairs, and the assurance that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.

It is also instructive to notice that Ezra in his fast and contemplated expedition, had an eye to *the glory of God*. It appears, from the narrative before us, that in certain interviews with King Artaxerxes in which they had conversed concerning the affairs of his people, and of his hopes and reliances, the pious Jew had expressed the most implicit confidence in the God of Israel; and now, as he was about to set forth upon his perilous journey, he was ashamed to ask the monarch for an escort of "soldiers and horsemen" lest it might be construed as indicating distrust of Jehovah. He preferred to brave the terrors of the desert with his feeble company, rather than compromise in the least the honor of his God, by invoking the protection of heathen spears. It is plain that Ezra's proclamation of a fast originated, in no small degree, from his sensitive and jealous regard for the divine honor, so far as it might be affected by his own conduct. I trust that this sentiment, so well calculated to exalt the Jewish leader in our esteem, mingles largely in the emotions and exercises of this solemnity. I rejoice, in particular, in the conviction that the honor of God as related to the condition of four millions of the descendants of Ham, whose lot has been cast in this Southern land, has had much to do in bracing many a heart to meet this crisis. Multitudes of devout souls have longed for opportunities and facilities in laboring for the spiritual improvement of this class, which have hitherto been denied or abridged by reason of the impertinent and malicious intermeddlings of those who are strangers to their real character and condition. Multitudes of such souls are looking forward with hope to the recognized independence of the new Confederacy, as an event

which will enable them to devote increased attention to the religious instruction of our servants, unimpeded by those natural suspicions and fears which now, in many places, greatly embarrass this service. Not with the ambitious wishes and aims of the proud builders of Babel, not to rear a political structure whose "top may reach unto heaven," and to "make a name" whose renown shall fill the ages, should the independence of the South be sought; but rather with the lofty purpose and desire of promoting God's glory, while securing our own rights and happiness.

In connection with these views and principles was another conviction which prompted and controlled the fast of Ezra; this was the cheering assurance that "*the hand of God was upon him for good.*" He had expressed this conviction to the Persian monarch in the following suggestive formula: "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him." He ventured to believe that he and his people were among those who sought and served the Lord, and who might thus appeal to Him for succor and protection in the hour of need. This encouraged him to proclaim his fast and engage in special services for obtaining the divine guidance. It is manifest, on the slightest reflection, that the persuasion that the hand of God is upon us for good, that, upon the whole, He is disposed to regard us with favor, is essential to cheer our religious solemnities with the reasonable prospect of happy consequences. This persuasion, humbly and unpretentiously cherished I hope, animates the people of the Confederate States to-day. With nothing, certainly, in their history to justify pride and self-complacency, certainly with very much to cause them shame and confusion of face, they still venture to think that, judged by fair standards, they are at least as much entitled to regard themselves as having "sought the Lord," and been true to Him, as their former political associates. They venture to believe, in particular, that, in the present controversy which is convulsing the land and hurling the two sections against

each other in the shock of battle, they have right on their side, and may therefore trust that the hand of God will be upon them for good. This conviction is probably as deep, as clear, as prevalent, as any which ever moved and united a people to accept the hazards of a revolution. I suppose it must be confessed, that a contrary persuasion is nearly as strong on the other side. In such a strange case, where two Christian peoples are solemnly appealing to heaven to witness the rectitude of their motives and the justice of their cause, God must and *will* judge betwixt them.

For my own part, in pronouncing the present war waged against the South most iniquitous and cruel, and in vindicating the defiant attitude of the Confederate States, I do not go far back for arguments and reasons. I have no occasion to review the long conflict which has raged between the North and South while united under a common Government, to rehearse the wrongs and aggressions of the former, which at length culminated in the overwhelming predominance of a party animated by a declared hostility to southern institutions. I have no occasion to discuss the constitutional right of secession. The great, patent, monstrous fact is enough for me, that the attempt to hold sovereign States together against their will, and coerce them into union by a war of invasion, is utterly opposed to the genius of our institutions and to all the traditions and maxims in which we have been educated touching a people's right to self-government. Common sense should dictate that when the interests of States, united under a voluntary compact, have become irreconcilably variant and clashing—when an unanticipated territorial expansion has been attained, so vast as almost, of itself, to forbid coherence and necessitate disintegration—when strifes and bickerings through long years have engendered mutual fear and hate—when the spirit of confidence and fraternity has wholly departed—especially when myriads on the one side charge the other with a sin which is an intolerable burden to their consciences—under such circumstances, I say, common sense should dictate that the aggrieved and dissatis-

fied States should be allowed to depart in peace. Had this been done at the right moment, I cannot doubt that many of the benefits of union would still have been mutually enjoyed, while its causes of irritation and annoyance would have been avoided. But under the inscrutable permissions of Providence it has been ordered otherwise; the unnatural, fratricidal, parricidal strife has begun, and the God of battles is appealed to in its decision. With full confidence in the justice of her cause, in the cheerful hope that the hand of God is on her for good, the Confederacy holds this fast and sends her sons to the red fields of war.

Perhaps I do not speak strongly enough to satisfy your tastes and wishes. Perhaps you would have me recite, in words hot with burning indignation, the alleged outrages and barbarities of the invader, and kindle your souls to a fury against him. Perhaps you long to hear sentences that would stir your spirits like the blast of a trumpet, until, transported with martial ardor, you should pant for the strife and thirst for blood. Were I competent to perform this service—and it is far from a difficult one—there are several considerations that would restrain me. In the first place, it would be a superfluous task; you do not need this sort of address to stimulate your patriotic devotion and excite you to defend and maintain your rights. In the second place, I seriously question whether it would be appropriate to the pulpit, especially on an occasion which contemplates self-abasement, penitence and humiliation. In the third place, all other considerations aside, I candidly avow that I do not think this service would be comely and modest as performed by *me*. I *cannot* forget—an intelligent and generous people would not respect me if I *could* forget—the hills that stand round about the scene of my birth and still cast their long shadows over the graves of my ancestors and kindred. I cannot forget those who, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, are arrayed on the other side of this most strange and appalling controversy. In one thus reared and circumstanced, you will be content, I am sure, with an honest, loyal disposition and determina-

tion to do his duty in every situation in which he may be placed, without expecting the fiery enthusiasm which cries "havoc," which fans and exasperates the strife, which is noisy, forward and pretentious. In one thus circumstanced, such a zeal might justly excite a suspicion of unsoundness either in his head or his heart.

The conviction, it has been said, which underlies this service, and without which we could scarcely engage in it with real honesty, is the conviction that right is on our side in the present contest, and that we enjoy the divine favor. This persuasion derives strong support and confirmation from observing the history of events since the inauguration of the Southern movement. Very marked and wonderful have been the orderings and overrulings of Providence, by which the threatened isolation of South Carolina was prevented, and State after State was brought to link their destinies with hers. Singular, and such certainly as *he* did not anticipate, was the effect of the removal of Major Anderson from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter; singular was the scattering by storm of the fleet that was intended for the relief of Fort Sumter, and the detention of the vessel that was to essay the desperate passage up the channel to that beleaguered fortress; alone among battles, without precedent or parallel, was the battle of Fort Sumter, with its bloodless victory; unexpected to himself probably, as it was to us, was the result of Mr. Lincoln's call for seventy-five thousand volunteers, in pushing yet other and reluctant States into the Confederate league. And now when it was proposed to paralyze and reduce to starvation and submission the "rebellious" provinces by the severities of a rigid blockade, the earth gives promise of harvests more generous than she has yielded for years. The ripening and already garnered grain dispels anxious fear, and justifies the hope that want will be a stranger to our borders. England, whose sympathies and moral support, at least, the North counted on with entire confidence, shows strong signs of favor to our *de facto* Government. Unquestionably these and many similar tokens of Provi-

dence in our behalf, have been signal, and are eminently adapted to deepen the impression that God seconds our designs with the resistless fiat of His will. The "obedient elements" have helped the Southern cause; the stars in their courses have fought for it; the winds and the waves have borne it onward; the propitious heavens have shed upon it their sweet and fertilizing influences. While I shrink from any confident and dogmatic interpretation of Providence, while we cannot read the purposes of Jehovah clearly until the end is reached and the result declared, still it *does* seem that all the signs prophesy distinctly the ultimate establishment of these Confederate States in a condition of recognized independence and nationality.

3. Besides happily directing our attention to the true end and principles of the present solemnity, the fast of Ezra also intimates to us *the exercises* that should distinguish it. He tells us that on this occasion he and his fellow colonists "afflicted themselves before God." These words depict, with graphic simplicity, the service and discipline appropriate to this day. It is not a day of thanksgiving, though of course grateful sentiments and utterances are not to be suppressed. It is a day of fasting, devoted especially to self-examination, confession of sin, self-chastisement, and all the spiritual exercises which constitute the signs and cultivate the temper of humiliation before God. By rending our hearts rather than our garments, by acknowledging, bewailing and renouncing our iniquities, let us contribute what we may toward averting the displeasure of God and propitiating His more marked favor. Though final success may come, it will come with more or less of judgment, disaster, and bitter dregs of sorrow, according to the genuineness and prevalence of religious sentiments among us. However right we may be in the great issue now made up for conclusive determination, no properly instructed mind will think of denying that our sins are sufficiently numerous and aggravated to justify the apprehension of divine displeasure. It is a striking observation of Lamartine that, "the misfortunes of a people do

not always proceed from the crimes of their enemies; they are more frequently the punishment of their own." Let us avoid the dangerous temptation of dwelling upon the iniquities of our foes, until we shall deny or forget our own. Let us trample on the pride of our hearts. Let us put away vamping and bravado. Let us guard against despising the enemy, and indulging an unreasonable confidence in our own superior prowess and virtue. The other side vaunt their numbers and riches; let us not imitate their folly by vaunting our valor and chivalry. It is good to afflict ourselves. God hates pride and the arrogance of self-sufficiency, but loves those whose contrite hearts "tremble at His word." He shortens His arm and closes His ear toward those who exalt themselves, but lifts up those who cast themselves down. The punishment of the flesh, by the denial of innocent appetites, is no farther serviceable than as it contributes to chasten the soul and reduce it to a frame of penitence and humility. It will be vain to starve the body, unless at the same time the devils are starved out of the heart. And remember, my brethren, that the aggregate of good accomplished by this solemnity will depend, not so much upon the energy with which you recount and deplore what are called "national sins," as upon the fidelity with which each one of you deals with his own transgressions, and afflicts his own soul.

Ezra also informs us that he "*besought*" God for this. He joined his companions in earnest supplications that His good hand might abide upon them, and direct them in a "right way" to Jerusalem. Doubtless, there were earnest wrestlings in prayer that day on the banks of the Ahava, with strong cryings and flowing tears. This should be a day of *much* prayer with us—prayer poured forth in the solemn assembly and in the privacy of retirement—prayer in the camp and in the cabinet—prayer by thousands of ministers, crying, between the porch and the altar, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach," and by tens of thousands of responsive hearts taking up the petition and sending it toward

heaven with an energy of desire and faith that cannot be denied.

Ezra closes his account of the transactions of that memorable day with the precious record—“*and He was entreated of us.*” His special religious service compassed the desired end; he prevailed with God and obtained a right way. May this momentous day, pregnant with the destinies of distant generations, prove equally auspicious in the annals of the Confederacy, and issue in the same grand result, “a right way for ourselves, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.”

There are those whose sanguine temperament and cheerful confidence cause them to see success already grasped, and a series of brilliant victories terminating in a speedy and glorious peace. I regret that I am not able to share these pleasing anticipations. I would not give a needless pang or anxiety to any heart; I would not be a gloomy prophet, croaking of evil and disaster; but I deem it my duty to risk acquiring such a reputation by warning you that it is not wise to indulge these bright visions. He is not the most judicious and kindest friend who, by flattering our hopes and wishes, exposes us to the anguish of a bitter disappointment. A severe and protracted struggle is probably before us, destined to be checkered by the vicissitudes which are apt to mark the fortunes of war. Let us make up our minds to this, and then a sudden and happy termination of the contest may bring us disappointment, but it will be a disappointment delightful to bear. But while I deem it the part of prudence to utter these admonitions and cautions, you will join me, I am sure, with all the earnestness of your souls, in the prayer that God may prove kinder to us than our reasonable fears suggest—that peace may soon be proclaimed—that tranquility may succeed our long disquietude and painful agitations—that confidence may revisit our troubled bosoms—that the bustle and din of revived commerce and trade may fill and gladden our streets and places of business—that spiritual prosperity may be vouchsafed to our languishing churches

—that our plaintive fast-day songs may speedily swell and burst into the anthems of thanksgiving, and our spirit of heaviness and exercises of humility be exchanged for the festal garments and joyful service of praise! Amen and amen.



