

A NINETEENTH CENTURY PRESBYTERIAN SERVICE

Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church

August 7, 2016

HISTORICAL NOTE

One hundred and forty years ago—July 2, 1876—the Rev. John Gordon stood in this pulpit and, in celebration of this church’s centennial, told the story of its founding: “At the close of the Revolution there came man after man, some from the pleasant valley of the Housatonic, some from the Berkshire hills, some from the Long Island shores, and some from steady old Connecticut—Puritan farmers, a sturdy race of men, who had from childhood gone Sabbath after Sabbath to the New England meeting-houses. These men, so nurtured, when they built houses for themselves, build also a house for their God.”

What was worship like in that first church, a log cabin according to Gordon, or in the first permanent church building, on Mount Pisgah, where services were first held in 1796—you will celebrate the 220th anniversary of that event here on September 11? The answer is, we don’t really know. It would not be hard to recreate the first Roman Catholic masses said in this country, or morning prayer as offered by colonial Episcopalians, or the Lutheran communion service of German immigrants after the revolution, but eighteenth or early nineteenth century Presbyterian worship? What we know is very limited.

The reason we know so little about early Presbyterian worship is that the founders of your church were, as Gordon said, Puritans. Presbyterians and Congregationalists—and there was very little difference (this congregation was actually begun under Congregational auspices and switched back and forth a few time)—believed that true religious faith was pure faith, stripped to the bare bones of every form of human elaboration. Statues, pictures, stained-glass windows, any colors at all, vestments, communion wafers rather than everyday bread, musical instruments, hymns, scripted prayers and liturgies of any kind, written sermons, prayer books, service books—indeed, any book except the Bible—Puritans banished all of it for fear of idolatry, things that might be worshipped in place of God and God’s inspired word in Scripture. Look around you: this building, erected fifty years after those first services, is still a picture of Puritan austerity.

We know only two things about those earliest services. They would have been extemporized, start to finish, by the minister: no prayers written in advance, no standard liturgy, nothing on paper, so except for a few ministers who secretly wrote out their sermons, we simply have no idea what was done and said. We do know what was sung, and how, because some strict churches follow similar practices today. The music would have been singing, unaccompanied, of psalms that had been turned into rhyming poems. Because there were no hymn books, the singing was lined out—the leader sang a line, the congregation repeated it. We will have an 18th century moment at the beginning of this service. Jan will lead us in lining out a metrical psalm: The words were written in the 16th century, and the tune, now called St. David, we know was sung on these shores when this church was founded, because it was Thomas Jefferson’s favorite: he used to hum it as he rode around the fields at Monticello.

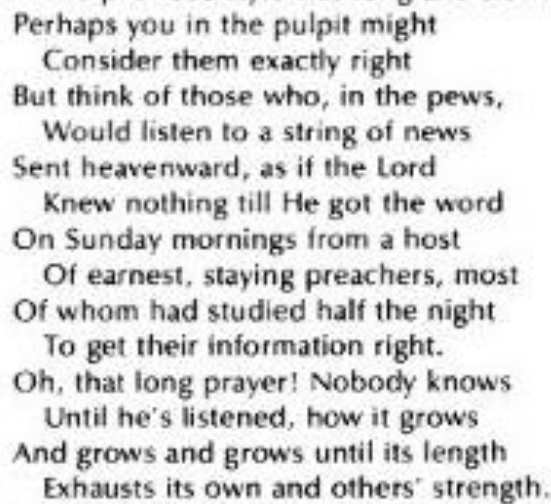
The theology behind Puritan worship is pretty compelling: The only God worth worshipping, worth giving our lives to, is so great, so awesome, so different from us—this God cannot be captured in sentimental pictures and poetry or pinned down in scripted liturgies and prayers that become so familiar that we forget that we are addressing them to the great and

mighty God. Worship requires the free flow of God’s spirit and the minute-by-minute inspiration of the Bible, with human elements kept out of the way as much as possible.

Great theory, but things did not work out so well in practice. First there was the problem of music. According to Barbara Dudley and Nancy Chase’s history, members of this church attended quite a few early 19th century revival meetings, big ecumenical gatherings with emotional preaching and enthusiastic singing, and there they heard hymns that weren’t psalms, led by accomplished singers and accompanied by organ and other instruments. It was the popular music of the day, and people, including Presbyterians, loved it. The Methodist, Baptist and Episcopal churches that started using those hymns attracted a lot of business. They were eating the Presbyterians lunch. In England, the greatest author of metrical psalms, Isaac Watts, began writing what were called “hymns of spiritual experience,” and the descendants of the Puritans who had stayed in England, often, like Watts, going to jail for their beliefs, began singing them.

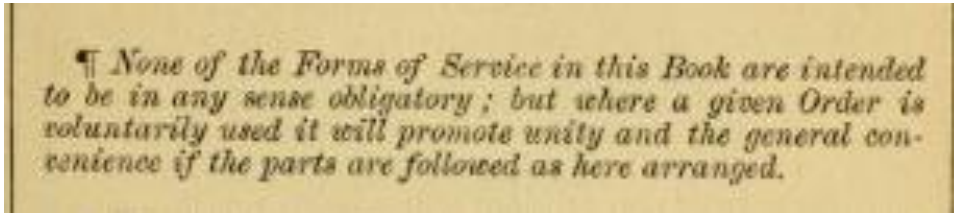
My guess is that by mid-century you were singing them too, and sometime later they were probably accompanied by the pump organ that is sitting in your vestibule and that Jan and I discovered needs some attention. It’s likely that getting that organ into the church involved a fight. Jon Walton, who preached here two weeks ago, said that when First Presbyterian in New York got its first organ, many families left the church. But the hymns and instruments movement eventually won the day. In 1874 the Presbyterians published their first hymnal. It was dominated by psalms, but there were also hymns by Watts and other writers that weren’t psalms, and a few American revival hymns as well. Everything that we are singing today comes from that book.

The other problem with Puritan worship was that there was one human element that couldn’t be removed: the minister who had to make up the entire service without any notes or prompts. Most clergy did not have the abilities required to do this: they rambled, they repeated themselves, they went on too long, they bored their congregations to tears. A Presbyterian newspaper reporter described the problem of “long and slow” prayers in doggerel poetry:



Perhaps you in the pulpit might
Consider them exactly right
But think of those who, in the pews,
Would listen to a string of news
Sent heavenward, as if the Lord
Knew nothing till He got the word
On Sunday mornings from a host
Of earnest, staving preachers, most
Of whom had studied half the night
To get their information right.
Oh, that long prayer! Nobody knows
Until he’s listened, how it grows
And grows and grows until its length
Exhausts its own and others’ strength.

And so liturgy crept in. By 1906 written prayers and services were prevalent enough that the Presbyterian Church dared to publish its first Book of Common Worship, the ancestor of the red book in your pew racks. It was carefully labelled. On the first page it said:



Still, the new book nearly split the church. Those who championed it were derided as Presbypalians. In response, one minister said:

'We accept canned meat, canned milk, canned fruit, and canned vegetables, but we can't stand for canned prayers.'

We don't know when canned prayers came into use here, but the 1906 Book probably reflects what most Presbyterian church were doing in the latter half of the 19th century, so we will use a service from that book today, to give you the flavor of what worship was like here a century or more ago. I will add a few more historical tidbits along the way, and the sermon, which will be brief because this historical note has been long, will be a look back at what your forebears might have thought about your theme this year. But otherwise, the words and the music of this service come to you from the past, many of them, I think, still powerful and helpful for shaping our faith today.

Let's begin our worship with that lined-out psalm 106, verses 1-5—sung to Thomas Jefferson's tune.


In the beginning: Psalm CVI 1-5

ST. DAVID

Playford's Book of Psalms, 1677

Psalms

80 ST. DAVID. C. M. PLAYFORD'S 'WHOLE BOOK OF PSALMS,' 1677.



PSALM CVI. 1-5.

<i>f</i> G IVE praise and thanks unto the Lord, For bountiful is he; His tender mercy doth endure To all eternity.	<i>mp</i> 3 Remember me, Lord, with that love Which thou to thine dost bear; <i>cr</i> With thy salvation, O my God, To visit me draw near:
<i>mf</i> 2 God's mighty works who can express? Or show forth all his praise? <i>cr</i> Blessed are they that judgment keep, And justly do always.	<i>mf</i> 4 That I thy chosen's good may see, And in their joy rejoice; <i>cr</i> And may with thine inheritance Triumph with cheerful voice.

CALL TO WORSHIP

INVOCATION

READING OF THE LAW

Response: *Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.*

CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON

THE COMMANDMENTS.

¶ *This Order may be used as a separate Service; or it may be said at the opening of Morning Service instead of the Order there appointed, down to the Reading of the Holy Scriptures; in which case it may be preceded by a suitable Hymn.*

¶ *Let all stand while the Minister reads the SENTENCES, the People answering him.*

Minister. Blessed are the undefiled in the way: who walk in the law of the Lord.

Answer. Order my steps in Thy Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

Minister. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies: and that seek Him with the whole heart.

Answer. With my whole heart have I sought Thee: O let me not wander from Thy commandments.

¶ *Then the Minister shall say,*

Let us pray.

¶ *Let the People reverently bow down while he leads them in*

THE INVOCATION.

ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

¶ *Then the Minister shall read THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, and the People, still bowing down, shall, after every Commandment, ask God's mercy for their transgressions in time past, and grace to keep the Law in time to come.*

GOD spake all these words, saying,

I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth : thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them : for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me ; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain : for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work : but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God ; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates : for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day ; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Honour thy father and thy mother : that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

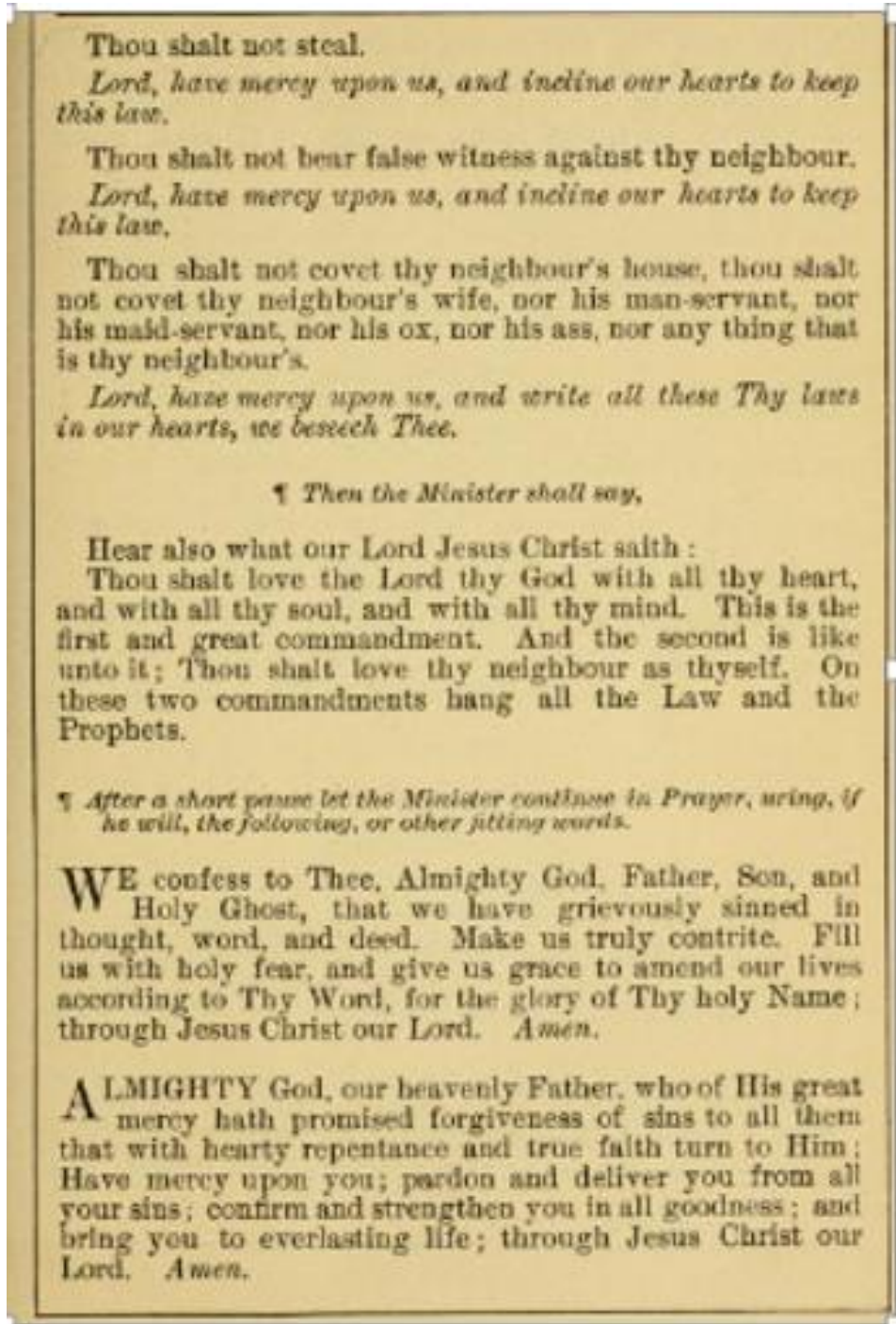
Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Thou shalt not kill.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

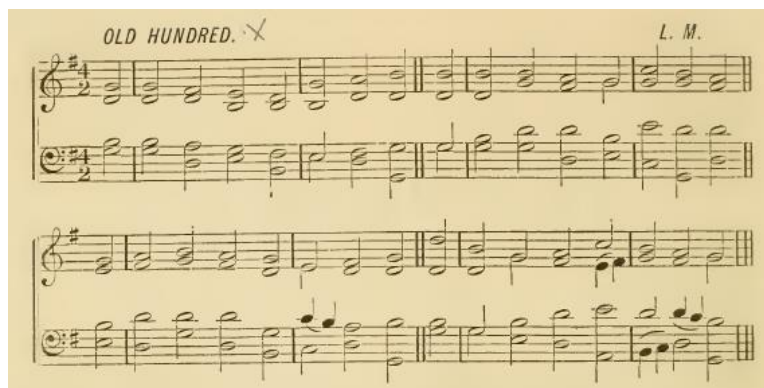
Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.



PSALM 100

OLD HUNDRED

We will sing today's psalm portion, with organ, as our forebears might have done in the latter part of the 19th century. This text of Psalm 100 and tune have been used in English-speaking Calvinist churches for almost all of their history. You know the tune and maybe the words as well.



1 ALL people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:
Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;
Come ye before him and rejoice.

2 Know that the Lord is God indeed;
Without our aid he did us make;
We are his flock, he doth us feed,
And for his sheep he doth us take.

3 Oh, enter then his gates with praise,
Approach with joy his courts unto
Praise, laud and bless his name always,
For it is seemly so to do.

4 Because the Lord our God is good,
His mercy is for ever sure:
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.

PRAYERS (omit Prayer at Sea)

Let us pray.

PRAYERS.

THANKSGIVING.

O GOD, by whose hand all living things were made, and by whose blessing they are nourished and sustained; We give Thee hearty thanks for all the bounties of Thy providence, wherewith Thou hast enriched our life; and we humbly pray that, enjoying Thy gifts in contentment, we may be enabled by Thy grace to use them to Thy praise. Especially we thank Thee for Thy great love in sending Thy Son to be the Saviour of the world and in calling us out of our sins into fellowship with Him: and we beseech Thee to grant us always Thy Holy Spirit, through whom we may grow continually in thankfulness toward Thee, as also into the likeness of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

SUPPLICATION.

O GOD, most holy, wise, and powerful Preserver and Governor of all Thy creatures and all their actions; Keep us this day in health of body and soundness of mind,

in purity of heart and cheerfulness of spirit, in contentment with our lot and charity with our neighbour; and further all our lawful undertakings with Thy blessing. In our labour strengthen us: in our pleasure purify us: in our difficulties direct us: in our perils defend us: in our troubles comfort us: and supply all our needs, according to the riches of Thy grace in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Amen.*

A TRAVELLER'S PRAYER.

LORD God omnipotent, who reignest in the heavens and on the earth; We implore Thy guidance and protection for all our journeyings. Against all perils be Thou our strong defense, and in far regions be Thou our faithful friend; keep us in health and heart; prosper the ends of our adventure, and make the way of our going and of our returning both safe and happy; and so direct the steps of all Thy pilgrims through this world, that we shall finally arrive in the better country, even the heavenly, with Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A PRAYER AT SEA.

O ETERNAL Lord God, who alone spreadest out the heavens, and rulest the raging of the sea; We commend ourselves to Thine almighty protection on the great deep. Guard us, we beseech Thee, from the dangers of the sea, from sickness, from the violence of enemies, from every evil; and conduct us in safety to our desired haven, with a grateful sense of Thy mercies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A PRAYER FOR FRIENDS AND KINDRED.

O LORD, our heavenly Father, bless and keep, we pray Thee, our kindred, friends, and benefactors, and graciously watch between them and us, while we are absent one from another, that in due time we may meet again to praise Thee, and hereafter dwell together in heavenly mansions; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A GENERAL INTERCESSION.

O GOD, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, we humbly beseech Thee for all sorts and conditions of men; that Thou wouldest be pleased to make Thy ways known unto them, Thy saving health unto all nations. More especially, we pray for Thy holy Church universal; that it may be so guided and governed by Thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Finally, we commend to Thy fatherly goodness all those who are any ways afflicted, or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; that it may please Thee to comfort and relieve them, according to their several necessities; giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

A GENERAL PRAYER IN THE MORNING.

ALmighty God, our Father and Preserver; We give Thee thanks that of Thy goodness Thou hast watched over us the past night, and brought us to a new day: and we beseech Thee to strengthen and guard us by Thy Spirit, that we may spend it wholly in Thy service and to Thy glory, looking for all prosperity to Thy blessing, and seeking only those things which are well-pleasing in Thy sight. Enable us, O Lord, while we labour for the life that now is, ever to have regard unto that heavenly life which Thou hast promised Thy children. Defend us in soul and body from all harm. And seeing it is a small thing to have begun well, except we also persevere, take us, O Lord, into Thy good keeping this day and all our days: continue and increase Thy grace within us, until we shall be perfectly united in the glory of Thy Son. Show Thy loving-kindness unto all men and women and little children, according to the need of every living soul, especially unto those whom we love, and those who are in any kind of trouble or distress, whom we now remember

silently before Thee : [*here let there be a moment of prayer in silence :*] Protect our country and prosper Thy Church : Bless all who do good in the world, and restrain and convert all who do evil. And finally, be pleased to cast out of Thy remembrance all our past offenses, forgiving them in Thy boundless mercy and purifying our hearts that we may lead a better life ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE LORD’S PRAYER
THE CREED

THE CREED.

I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth :
And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord ; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried ; [*He descended into hell ; **] The third day He rose again from the dead ; He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty ; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost ; The Holy Catholic Church ; The Communion of Saints ; The Forgiveness of sins ; The Resurrection of the body ; and the Life everlasting. *Amen.*

THE OFFERING

A PRAYER OF DEDICATION.

O GOD, most merciful and gracious, of whose bounty we have all received ; We beseech Thee to accept this Offering of Thy people. Remember in Thy love those who have brought it, and those for whom it is given ; and so follow it with Thy blessing that it may promote peace and good-will among men, and advance the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

^{12h}Now we beseech you brethren, that ye ⁱacknowledge them which labor among you, and are over you in the ⁱLord, and admonish you.

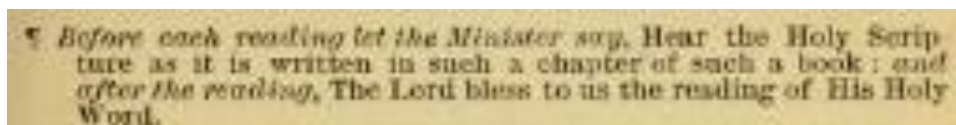
¹³That ye have them in singular love for ^ktheir work’s sake. ^lBe at peace among yourselves.

Can you guess what translation of the Bible I’m reading from? It sounds like the King James, but it’s not. Fifty-one years before James I set scholars to work on the translation now

known as the Authorized Version, Protestants who had fled to Geneva during the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary made their own translation, now known as the Geneva Bible. They brought it back to England with them after Mary’s death, where it was the first English Bible that was mass-produced—everyone could have a copy. Shakespeare used the Geneva translation. The Pilgrims brought it to these shores on the Mayflower.

King James, almost immediately after he ascended to the throne, authorized his own translation because the Geneva Bible had footnotes that were too Protestant and Calvinistic for his Church of England tastes. But the Geneva Bible continued to outsell the King James Version until James ordered that the printing of Geneva Bibles be stopped in England. In this country, however, it remained the translation of choice, and it was almost certainly used in this church at the time of its founding and long after.

Hear the Holy Scripture as it is written in the first letter to the Thessalonians.



¹²^hNow we beseech you brethren, that ye ^[i]acknowledge them which labor among you, and are over you in the ^[i]Lord, and admonish you.

¹³ That ye have them in singular love for ^[k]their work’s sake. ^[l]Be at peace among yourselves.

¹⁴ ^[m]We desire you, brethren, admonish them that are ^[n]out of order: comfort the feebleminded: bear with the weak: be patient toward all men.

¹⁵ ^[o]See that none recompense evil for evil unto any man: but ever follow that which is good, both toward yourselves, and toward all men.

¹⁶ ^[p]Rejoice evermore.

¹⁷ Pray continually.

¹⁸ In all things, give thanks, for this is the ^[q]will of God in Christ Jesus toward you.

¹⁹ ^[r]Quench not the Spirit.

²⁰ Despise not ^[s]prophesying.

²¹ Try all things, *and* keep that which is good.

²² ^[t]Abstain from all ^[u]appearance of evil.

²³ Now the very God of peace ^[v]sanctify you throughout: and *I pray God* that your whole spirit and soul and body, may be kept blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁴ [w|x](#)Faithful *is he* which calleth you, which will also [y](#)do it.

The Lord bless to us the reading of his holy word.

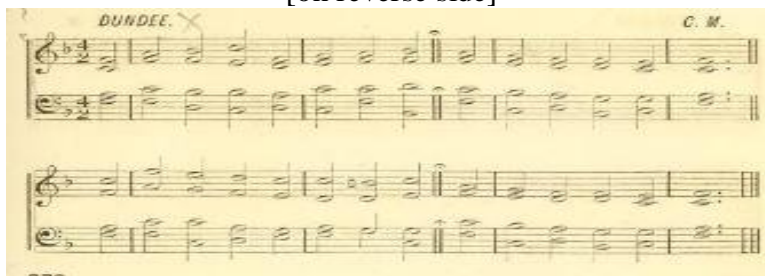
SERMON: “Evil for Evil”

The next hymn is not a psalm. It is one of those songs of spiritual experience that was probably controversial here at some point in the 19th century. It is made more acceptable in the 1874 hymnal by being paired with a Scottish psalm tune. The words were written by William Cowper, an English poet who joined with John Newton to publish the Olney Hymns, the collection that contained Newton’s hymn Amazing Grace. Cowper struggled with depression his whole life, and this beautiful hymn reflects that struggle.

HYMN: “God Moves In A Mysterious Way”

DUNDEE

[on reverse side]



369

- 1 God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform ;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
- 2 Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.
- 3 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take ;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.
- 4 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace ;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
- 5 His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour ;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.
- 6 Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain ;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

CLOSING PRAYER

ALmighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto Thee : and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in Thy Name Thou wilt grant their requests ; Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of Thy servants, as may be most expedient for them ; granting us in this world knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

The last hymn, one of those spiritual experience texts written in England, became popular in this country when it was joined with a tune from the early American shape note tradition, a system for writing music for people who might not be able to read. It was sung in the revivals and made its way into the 1874 hymnal, but the stricter Presbyterians would not have permitted it to be sung in church until at least the end of the 19th century. Let’s conclude our old school worship with *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, which you can find, without too many modernizing changes, in the hymnal in the pews as number 475.

HYMN: “Come Thou Fount of Eve’ry Blessing”

Glory to God 475

NETTLETON

BENEDICTION AND ASCRIPTION

THE BENEDICTION.

THE grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you
all. *Amen.*

¶ *Or this :*

THE peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep
your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of
God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord ; and the bless-
ing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy
Ghost, be amongst you, and remain with you always.
Amen.

ASCRIPTION.

NOW unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and
to present us faultless before the presence of His
glory with exceeding joy ; to the only wise God our Sav-
iour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both
now and ever. *Amen.*