

EZRA RIPLEY

Lessons from an Old Manse #5

Ezra Ripley in his sermon “Fidelity in Christian Ministers,” delivered 1809:

“It is, perhaps, in the nature of things, as impossible for men to think alike as to wear the same countenance.”



HISTORY

Born in 1751, Ezra Ripley was the second minister to reside in The Old Manse. He arrived in this home as a young minister to study with Reverend William Emerson. He died here having been Concord’s minister for over 60 years.

The Manse can tell us a great deal about Ezra and his life. He wrote over 3,000 sermons at this standing desk, which had been modified to be taller for Ripley’s 6-foot frame. His journals and letters written here demonstrate his pride in living in a house connected to the Battle of Concord

in 1775. He carried this pride into the care of this home, planting apple trees and maintaining well the home and pastures.

While Ezra left an impression on this house, his impact on his congregation was even greater. At a time when many ministers in New England criticized and even condemned any difference in religious thought, Ezra preached understanding and acceptance. In an 1809 sermon, he noted that God had created a world with so much natural variety that he must also see a benefit to spiritual variety. By accepting difference, he encouraged all to enjoy the “liberty of conscience” and called for a united focus on kindness and care, proclaiming:

“however Christians may differ in defining essentials, we must all agree in this, that charity is essential; for without charity we are nothing.”

FOR CONTEMPLATION OR DISCUSSION

Beliefs

- How does Ezra Ripley's support for religious variety fit with your understanding of religion in New England 100-200 years earlier? How would you characterize the difference between Ezra's preachings and those of early Puritan ministers in Massachusetts?
- How would you describe charity? Do you agree with Ezra that charity is essential?

Modified Furniture

- We get a sense of Ezra's height from the standing desk that he used, which was modified to be more comfortable for his taller frame. Has any furniture in your home been changed to make it more comfortable for you or your family members? What would the furniture in your home tell about you and your household?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write about an act of charity that changed your life. Were you giving or receiving this act? What place does charity hold in the larger world?
- While Trustees curators can clearly see that Ezra's desk was modified, the changes are not obvious to most of us. Imagine a story in which a museum curator's training and expertise solves a mystery or discover an important fact!

CONNECTIONS

- Have you ever used a standing desk? Try stacking books or cardboard boxes on a desk or table to create a writing surface at a comfortable standing height for you. Is it comfortable to write or draw this way? Would it be comfortable for a long period of time?
- Charity is possible even when you are stuck at home! Check out this [searchable database](#) of volunteer opportunities for kids. If you're 14 or older, you can volunteer for the [Smithsonian Institute](#), transcribing historical documents right from your home.

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