VAN CLEEF

SERMON
1870

FIRST REFORMED
DUTCH CHURCH.
VAN VORST, J. C.
First Reformed H. D. Church of Van Vorst

Jersey City.
SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

First Reformed Prot. Dutch Church of Van Horst,
JERSEY CITY.

BY

REV. PAUL D. VAN CLEEF,

ON THE

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY

OF HIS SETTLEMENT AS PASTOR.

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1870.
SERMON.

"Ask now of the days that are past."—Deut. 4:33.

"We are so thoughtless," says Paschal, "that we wander through the time that is not ours, and think not of that which alone belongs to us; so vain that we dream of the time that is not, and suffer that which alone exists to escape us without a thought." The only time that we can really claim as our own is the present moment. The past is gone, and the future is with God. There is a sense in which we are not to "forget the things that are behind." Memory has an important relation to progress. If the past were blotted out we should lose all the strength and courage to be derived from experience. We should be in the sad condition of the careless navigator who every day loses his log-book, and with it the benefit of his previous observations and reckonings. We are all historians also; and it is well to revise carefully the pages we have written, and correct their errors before we turn over a new and unsullied leaf. There are seasons peculiarly appropriate to such a retrospect, when

"'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,
And ask them what report they bore to heaven."

Moreover, grateful recollection kindles the eye of hope, and quickens our steps in the Christian race. We
have been accustomed, on every new-year Sabbath, to glance over the preceding year, and gather such encouragement as the review might afford. Twenty years have passed since we began these annual reviews, and it may be well now to make a rapid excursion over the whole field, and see whether memory may not glean some treasures worthy of being garnered for eternity. Let us question the days that are past, and listen to their voice as it speaks with the authority of experience and the solemnity of the grave. I desire this morning, my dear brethren, to talk familiarly with you of old times gone by, of old friends passed away; and of God's dealings with us as a Church during the years in which I have gone in and out before you as your Pastor.

How many of you can go back with me to the first Sabbath of November, 1849? This Church was then nearly four years old, having been organized in the spring of 1846. It had enjoyed the services of a Pastor for about three years, the Rev. Wm. J. R. Taylor having been installed Sept. 27, 1846. Under his efficient ministry it had become a vigorous young Church, numbering on its roll 91 communicants. This edifice had been occupied about 18 months, having been dedicated on the 28th of May, 1848, and the pulpit had been vacant, after the resignation of Rev. Mr. Taylor, scarcely one month when I came, in response to a repeated invitation of the Consistory, and spent the Sabbath (Nov. 4) here, to see what the will of the Lord might be. After preaching in the morning and afternoon, visiting the Sabbath School, and attending the monthly concert in the evening, I left, secretly and sincerely hoping that no further questions of duty would grow out of this visit, for I had no
desire to leave my pastoral charge at Coxsackie. But on the following Saturday evening a call was placed in my hands to become the pastor of this little flock, which, after many fears and misgivings, was accepted, and on the 9th of December I preached my first sermon as the pastor elect, from Exod. 33:15, "If thy presence go not with me carry us not up hence." I have often felt that the corresponding promise was fulfilled, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." On the following day, Dec. 10th, the Classis of Bergen made arrangements for my installation, which took place on Sabbath evening, Dec. 30th, before a crowded audience, a new organ for the first time lending its aid to the voice of praise. On the following Sabbath I preached an inaugural sermon as pastor, from 1 Cor. 4:1: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God;" which was an attempt to set forth the proper estimate of the ministerial office and character. I said, "You will expect me, as the steward of the mysteries of God in this branch of His family, to exhibit the distinctive doctrines of our Church, which we believe to be according to the Scriptures, and also to speak plainly upon all the great moral questions which agitate our country, and are connected with the welfare of Zion." With this announcement of underlying principles, I entered upon the duties of this pastoral relation, now the oldest in this city. They have been varied and arduous, but pleasant, and as to their results eternity must make the final and full disclosure. The lapse of twenty years has consecrated this relation by many of those solemn and affecting providences which tend to strengthen and endear all human ties.

Let us pause here, and take a survey of this city as
it then appeared. Jersey City, as a corporation, extended only as far up as Grove Street. All the region north and west was known by the names of Harsimus and Pavonia, but was really the Township of Van Vorst, and hence the corporate name of this Church is the “First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in the Township of Van Vorst,” a name which has lost its significance, as the names of other churches will ere long lose theirs in the consolidated City of New Jersey. The population of what is now Jersey City was, in June, 1850, 11,578, where now we have nearly 55,000. We were comparatively destitute of the conveniences and comforts which belong to a city. We had no gas, no water works, no sewers of any account, no cars or regular omnibuses, very poor pavements, no convenient public halls. We had one public school, and the nucleus of another gathered in an old frame building in South 6th Street. There was a Tract Society, organized in 1837, and doing much good. Of churches, we had one Presbyterian, one Methodist, one Episcopal, the fragments of three Baptist congregations just crystalizing into the “Union Baptist Church,” a small independent organization which soon became extinct, one Roman Catholic, and one Reformed Dutch Church, besides our own. Since then there have been organized twenty churches, an average of one each year. Of these, four have ceased to exist, leaving a net gain of sixteen, of which thirteen are Protestant, and three are Roman Catholic. All the Sabbath Schools of the city then assembled, at their Spring Anniversary, in the Presbyterian Church on Washington Street; and I remember on one occasion with what pride the venerable pastor, the Rev. Dr. Johnstone, surveyed the scene, as he saw the lower part of the
edifice almost filled with children. At our last anniversary we crowded seven churches, and marched in procession through the streets, an army of between four and five thousand.

And here I may appropriately introduce some reminiscences of our own school. The Sabbath School of this Church was organized January 16th and 23d, 1848, nearly two years after the planting of the Church. This may seem strange until we recall the fact that the members of this Church were so largely represented in a Mission Sabbath School in South 6th Street, first organized by Mr. E. B. Sippell and a few others, as early as 1837, that had they withdrawn, it would have endangered the existence of that useful institution. That Sabbath School has been the feeder of three churches. First of this church, then of the Second Presbyterian, and finally of the Third Reformed Church. When that school became strong enough to be divided, and the basement of this Church was ready for occupancy, a school was formed under the direction of the Consistory, with eleven teachers and about forty scholars. Of the original teachers one remains in active service. Some are dead, and others have removed from the city. Of the original scholars enrolled on that day, two are now in the school as teachers. On the 8th of May, 1849, an infant class of thirteen scholars was formed, with Mrs. E. S. Donovan as teacher. Our present Infant Department was begun by Mrs. D. S. Kimball in her own house; then conducted by Mr. E. B. Sippell until his death in 1855; then for thirteen years by Mr. R. N. Perlee. It is now under the care of Mr. A. B. Perlee. This infant class has been a marked feature in the history of our growth. It has, at times, numbered almost one hundred, and
has been the prolific nursery of the school and the Church. Those faithful teachers who have impressed the rudiments of scripture truth upon these infant minds for successive years, have performed a work greater than can be appreciated at the present time. It is when we look over an interval of twenty years in the life of a church that we see the worth of a little child. There are active young members of our Church now whose infant lips were first taught in that class to sing the praises of Jesus, whom they there learned to love. The changing currents of Providence have swept many of these little ones away; some into the grave, others in various directions over the sea of life; but wherever they are, if true to the instructions they received here, they are not lost to the Church, or to the cause of Christ. Not a few of the children of this Church can be traced from their spiritual birthplace here to fields of usefulness and honor. Some heard their country's call in its dark hour, and laid their lives a sacrifice on the altar of patriotism. One, Rev. E. T. Corwin, is the pastor of a large congregation, and already known as a scholar and an author. Another is devoting her life to the cause of Christ as the wife of our veteran Missionary, Dr. Talmage, in China; and others still are in various stages of preparation for the ministry, and for other spheres of usefulness. Our Sunday School has been a nursery not only for this Church but for others. There are active and useful young Christians in other denominations in this city and elsewhere, who from convenience, or by the invitation of faithful visitors, were brought into our infant class, and after growing up and finding the Saviour here, have connected themselves with other churches. We do not complain of this, for in almost every in-
stance the young converts have gone to the fold where their parents belong; and this is right. We have never kept up our numbers by proselyting from other schools. We have had children of Baptist and Episcopalian families, and when converted we have said to them, "Go join the Church with your parents, unless they prefer to have you remain with us." It would be pleasant if we could keep and garner all the fruits of our planting and culture, but in a mixed and changing population this is impossible. It is a great satisfaction to meet our old scholars in other useful fields, where some are superintendents and officers as well as teachers, and to know that there are hundreds scattered abroad who remember our school with grateful affection.

The following is a record of the superintendents of our Sunday School in the order and with the period of service of each: B. W. Ryder, one year and four months; A. D. Hope, two years; J. D. Lawrence, one year; James Lauder, one year and six months; M. Bailey, two years and six months; A. S. Whiton, three years; Thomas M. Gopsill, ten years and six months. Mr. Gopsill has been connected with the school almost twenty years.

Our Bible Classes also have been an important element of growth in the Church. It is with peculiar pleasure that I recall the memory of the young persons who constituted the Pastor's Bible-Class ten years ago, most of whom have become the disciples of Christ. The other Bible-Classes have been blessed in a similar manner.

But I turn to another subject, not foreign to this, for our Sunday School has always been closely identified with it, I mean our Missionary work. But for the Board of Domestic Mission this Church would
not have been organized so early, if at all. An appropriation of $350, very liberal for that time, gave the enterprise a fair start, and in four years it was self-sustaining. Since then we have received no aid for any purpose from abroad, but have sustained with a liberal hand every department of the Church's benevolent work, besides contributing to all the objects of patriotic and Christian charity that have presented a worthy claim. A Youth's Missionary Society was organized in the Sunday School in May, 1854, and its contributions have amounted to about $2,300, averaging for a few years past from two to three hundred dollars a year, which have been devoted to Foreign and Domestic Missions. Since the establishment of the Morgan Street Mission School, March 3, 1861, the Society has appropriated part of its funds towards the support of this cherished institution. Thus our youth are linked in sympathy with the work of Missions at home and abroad, at our own doors and in heathen lands. They have also contributed liberally to furnish libraries for the seamen, and a long catalogue of these Ship's Libraries adorns the walls of the Sabbath School room, together with other reminders of love and duty to our fellow-men. Our Sunday School has also been accustomed to make a Christmas gift in money—this year amounting to nearly forty dollars—to the Morgan Street School, as an expression of love and good will. Our Church has also been a liberal supporter of the City Mission and Tract Society, since its organization sixteen years ago, both by annual contributions and through its faithful tract visitors. It has contributed toward the endowment of Rutgers College, the furnishing of Hertzog Hall, and the education of young men for the ministry, and
has an honorable record on the books of all the benevolent boards of the Synod. It would be impossible to say how much has been given for benevolent purposes through various channels, but the collections for recognized and accepted objects as reported to Classis, amount in the aggregate for the past twenty years to about $35,000. For the general current expenses of the church, enlargement, repairs, etc., the congregation has contributed during the same period about $70,000. When this church was erected its founders thought they were building for another generation. They could not appreciate the rapidity of the changes which had just begun. As early as 1851 the church was full, and Providence opened the way for enlargement. On the 13th of Dec. of that year, a fire broke out very mysteriously in the upper part of the church, which destroyed the organ, and injured the building to such an extent that it could not be repaired until spring. In the meantime a plan of enlargement was matured and carried out, in connection with the repairs, and the present organ was placed in the gallery. The church was enlarged, frescoed, greatly improved, and reopened on the 13th of June, 1852. About this time we dismissed a number of families to organize the Third Church; but notwithstanding this double increase of room, in a few years every pew was rented, and then we discussed the feasibility of further enlargement by taking down the side walls, and widening the building. We procured plans and estimates from an architect, which, if followed out, would have given us a handsome and commodious church edifice; but upon a more thorough examination it was found that the cost of the proposed alteration would approach so nearly that of an entirely new building that
the project was abandoned. In 1861, chiefly through the efforts of the "Ladies' Mite Society," which has been a silent, unostentatious, but very efficient organization for more than fifteen years, and on several occasions of financial difficulty has come to the aid of the treasurer, the church was again completely renovated, the walls retouched, the wood-work grained, the floors recarpeted, and this beautiful pulpit erected, all at an expense of nearly $2,000. Again during the past two years repairs and improvements have been made at a cost of about $1,000. While these necessary improvements have been going on we have never given up the idea of a new and larger edifice for our growth in this part of the city. I need not name the difficulties that have been in the way of this desirable consummation. They still exist; but great changes are destined to take place in the material aspects of this city within a few years, which may affect our Churches in a way that we cannot now foresee. We must leave the future with God. We are now questioning the days that are past, and looking at present duty.

Let me briefly refer now to labors and results. During the twenty years under review I have preached in this church nearly three thousand sermons and lectures, and conducted your devotional services about one thousand times. Eighty Communion Sabbaths have found us gathered around the Lord's table. On only one of these occasions have I been absent, and seldom have we failed to welcome some new guests to the feast.

The number of communicants reported to Classis in 1849 was eighty-one, the number of families ninety. The congregation gradually increased until 1859, when
we numbered one hundred and fifty-six families, and two hundred and forty-nine members. Since that time there has been no material increase in our congregation. When a church edifice becomes full, the growth of the Church ceases, and there is great danger of decay. We were full and had not a pew to let ten years ago. As a natural consequence we are really no stronger in numbers now, for many who would have been with us have found a home elsewhere. Our Sabbath School also has remained stationary from the same cause. As a Church grows older, and other organizations spring up around it with their schools, its Sabbath School must depend for its scholars chiefly upon the children of its own families. We have not become stagnant, however, either in Church or School, for our Mission in Morgan Street affords room for a healthy development of Christian zeal and Church life. After pruning our Church records of absentees whose residence is unknown, we find two hundred and sixty-two members in full Communion. During some years the dismissions and deaths have exceeded the accessions. The year 1858, however, was one long to be remembered for the precious reviving influences of the Holy Spirit enjoyed by this Church, in common with the other churches of our land. During that year we received sixty-one persons, thirty-three on confession. Within the twenty years five hundred and ten members have been added to the Church, two hundred and fifty-nine have been dismissed, and fifty-one have died. Of those received by letter one hundred and forty have come from Reformed Dutch Churches, one hundred and twenty-five from Presbyterian Churches, and about forty from various other denominations, including the Methodist, Lutheran,
Baptist, Moravian, Congregational, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic. Thus our Church presents a beautiful illustration of Christian Union, being composed of representatives from almost every branch of the Church Catholic. Besides the converts from Romanism, received into our communion, I have been permitted in pastoral labor to bring several others to Christ, who never joined the Church, but died in the Protestant faith. In truth, the members actually received into the Church and recorded on our books, do not represent the full results of our gospel work. In a city like this, with a rapidly increasing and fluctuating population, an active church with its ministry reaches thousands who never become identified with it permanently. For example, while but fifty-one members of this Church have died in twenty years, I have attended three hundred and eighty-three funerals, not more than one-third of which, I presume, have been within my pastoral charge. The same remark may be made of the two hundred marriages solemnized during the same time. I often feel humbled in view of the meager results of my ministry; but there is a grateful satisfaction in thinking of bread cast upon the waters, and found after many days. A family attended this Church in the early part of my ministry, and moved away. Several years elapsed, when I received a letter from the husband requesting me to attend the funeral of his wife in the City of New York. She trusted that she had found a blessing in this sanctuary, and it was her dying wish that the pastor under whose ministry she had secured a hope in Christ should officiate at her burial. Another family, whose children were in our Sabbath School, left us and removed to New York, and I lost sight of them until re-
quested to visit the husband in his sickness. He had been irreligious and inclined to infidelity, but he cherished pleasant recollections of our Church and School, and these paved the way to his heart, and I had the satisfaction of hearing from his lips before he died an earnest confession of faith in Christ. It is interesting to trace the ramifications of personal influence through successive years. We cannot follow out through all their windings the consequences of our actions, for they are inwoven with the lives of our fellow-men. This much is clear, however, that every one has some influence, and no man liveth unto himself.

The fluctuating character of our population is unfavorable to fruit gathering. So far as mere preaching is concerned this fact is not so much to be deplored, for a minister within narrow walls may preach the Gospel to a great many people, and scatter the precious seed far and wide; but as to pastoral efficiency there is much in it to dishearten. Personal influence over individuals is of slow growth. Families come into the congregation, the pastor and officers welcome them, and the foundation is laid in mutual respect for a salutary religious influence in the future. Suddenly they are gone. Such a family I have in mind as an example. They had lived in this city for several years, their children attending our Sunday School, and the parents being frequently found at our church. At length they became deeply interested and took a pew, and the family had a home in the sanctuary. They were often at the prayer-meeting; and we had good hope that they would soon unite with us, when one Sabbath last summer the pew was vacant. They had removed to a neighboring city. Thus we plant and
water, and God promises the increase. The fruit appears almost ripe, when suddenly the whole vine, clusters, blossoms and all are plucked up and planted in another soil, perhaps to flourish, perhaps to die. But we must not complain or be discouraged. We know that souls have been converted, and that God’s people have been cheered in their pilgrimage. This Church has been a candlestick holding forth during these years to many travelers the light of the Gospel. Let us think of those who have been comforted in sickness and affliction; of the little ones who have expressed a sweet hope in death, and have expired with the precious name of the Saviour on their lips; of those who have often met in the social prayer-meeting, and at the Lord’s table, and have felt that it was “good to be there;” of those who have been pricked in their heart, and have come to inquire what they must do to be saved, and have here surrendered themselves to Christ. Let us think of the sermons preached, of the fervent prayers offered in faith, of the private warnings and admonitions, known only to those who gave and those who received them, of the repeated teachings of the Sunday School, “line upon line and precept upon precept,” of the tracts distributed and the visits made from house to house, of the precious seed sown by the side of all waters, of our delightful warm-hearted household prayer-meetings. When we remember all these things can we feel that we have lived and labored together here in vain? No, let us confess ourselves unprofitable servants, but “thank God and take courage.”

Let us now glance at some of the changes which twenty years have wrought. As we sail down the stream of time we can hardly realize its swiftness. It
is only when we take a position on the shore, and see it roll along that we are able to appreciate the rapidity of the current. Where are those who filled these pews twenty years ago? On the present map of the Church I can find only about a dozen names that were on the map for 1849, and of the communicants then on the roll only fifteen remain. Of the twenty-four heads of families who signed the petition for this Church two remain; of the twenty-five communicants three are with us. Of the Consistory who executed my call one yet lives. Of one hundred and fifty families on the roll ten years ago nearly one hundred have removed. The change among the people has been almost equivalent to a removal on the part of the pastor to another charge. During this time the First and Third Reformed Churches have had each six pastors, and the former is again vacant. There have been changes also in all the other churches of the city. The First Presbyterian has its fourth pastor, the Second Presbyterian its third, St. Matthew's its fourth, Grace Church its third. I mention these facts for information, not for comparison, nor to afford ground for a judgment as to the desirableness of permanency in the pastoral relation. Our sister Reformed Churches have been agitated by alternate hopes and fears, and each has, at least once during the period under review, passed through a season of gloom when its continued existence was almost despaired of. We remember when the Third Church was nearly destroyed by an unfortunate change of pastors, and recovered only by the most self-denying exertions. I have, on several occasions, presided at the dismissal of pastors from these churches, when the change seemed disastrous, but God, no doubt, in each instance meant it for good.
Churches, as well as individuals, may receive valuable lessons in the school of trial, under the great teacher Experience. Perhaps the same vicissitudes would have been a good discipline for this Church. We may have sailed along too smoothly. A few storms and threatened shipwrecks might have been "a blessing in disguise." This might have been a larger, stronger Church, with a new and more costly edifice, if I had left you, and another more enterprising and ambitious had filled this place. Perhaps I might have done more for the Master in some other of the fields which have been open to me. Who shall decide, now that it is too late to live these twenty years over again? If it were possible to recall the past, I think I should do just as I have done, for there has been no time when there seemed to be any good reason for severing a relation that had already become cemented by the love, and sympathy, and confidence of so many years of Christian friendship, and social intercourse. There are various causes for ministerial changes, found sometimes in the pastor, at other times in the people, and often in both, and not always creditable to either. The tendency to frequent changes is increasing. Many of our churches have practically adopted the system of itineracy with all its evils and none of its advantages. "Dominie," said an old elder to me, as the Classis had just dissolved an unhappy pastoral relation, "if we get another minister don't fasten us so tight that we can't get loose if we wish to." A pastoral relation formed with such a want of mutual confidence would be something like the nuptial tie with our new fashioned ideas of marriage. A minister is not bound to a church until death parts the bond, although, without doubt, the most hallowed and blessed reunions
in the heavenly world will be those of the faithful pastor and the people among whom he has lived, and labored, and died. To my mind there is but one thing more unpleasant than the voluntary separation of a pastor from an attached people, and that is an enforced separation from a people alienated, cold, and unfriendly. It is a sad thing for a pastor to survive the love and confidence of his flock.

As to the comparative advantage of long or brief pastorates, it may be difficult to decide. But there is one consideration that we cannot overlook. It comes back as a response when we interrogate the days that are past. There is a power for good in long-continued friendship, the intimacy of years of companionship and sympathy in joy and sorrow, amid the various and changing scenes of life. The Church has an organic life which continues from generation to generation. “Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children.” A pastor who has lived with his people while all these changes have been going on, who has seen the fathers depart and the children take their places, occupies a peculiarly interesting position. He has read each family history of joy or sorrow; prosperity or adversity. He can touch hidden chords of memory, of sympathy, and of affection, which, like the strings of a violin, grow sweeter in tone as they become older. The most beautiful architectural pile may be erected in a few years. The stone may be quarried and dressed, and laid up in the walls by hurried labor, the progress proportioned to the number of hands employed; but a multitude of laborers cannot cover those cathedral walls and crown those turrets with the green ivy. Time alone, with slow and patient fingers, can weave those mantling glories of the ancient church and castle. The pride of
Westminster Abbey is not in its architectural splendors which the workman's hammer and chisel could in a few years far excel, but in the treasured dust of kings and princes, poets and sages, artists and heroes—the honored of the realm who have been gathered there as the centuries rolled away. You may build your house, lay out your grounds, form rustic bridges, and make artificial fountains, but the shrubbery, and vines, and shade-trees, that give to your home its air of beauty and comfort, are the growth of years. The traditions of the family, and the institutions of the nation, become sacred with age. May not the roots of ministerial influence strike deep down into those long-cherished friendships? I remember the old family physician of the village, with his familiar equipage. Few of the present generation knew when he first appeared, only they know that in all their sicknesses he has been with them. He has risen from his bed at midnight to come to theirs. He has risked his own life in storm and darkness to quench the fever that was wasting theirs. When father and mother were sick, he was at their bedside; and, as life was ebbing, his voice became more tender and soothing; and at last, when the dread hour came, the children clung to him as though life and death were in his hand. Others more scientific and learned, perhaps, have come into the place, but we cannot go to them as we could to him. None can prescribe for us like our old physician, who has always known us, and whom we have always loved. Is there not a parallel between the physician of the body and the physician of the soul? There is something exceedingly interesting to my mind in the fact that the last three pastorates of the church of Bergen cover a period of 108 years, Dr. Taylor having been the pastor already forty-one years
and six months. Without having yet completed half that period, I can speak of some of those elements of influence which are the growth of years. I see before me those whose course I have watched from childhood, the offspring of parents whose hands I have joined in holy wedlock. Upon 309 infants I have sprinkled the baptismal waters, and baptized fifty-two adults on profession of their faith. I have knelt at the bedside of your sick and dying, and stood by the coffin's remains of your loved ones to speak words of consolation, and have gone with you "to the grave to weep there," where "Jesus wept." Of the families now connected with the church, I have seen twenty-one of the parents, either father or mother, laid in the grave; of fifty-two families, I have buried one or more of the children, in youth or infancy. Does not all this continued intercourse through joys and sorrows, smiles and tears, sunshine and storm, contain and develop some germs of influence which must be wanting where changes in the pastorate frequently occur? A tree left in its place to grow, will strike its roots deeper into the soil and take firmer hold with its fibres than if transplanted every few years; and it certainly will bear more fruit.

You will agree with me that maturity of thought, and study of books and men, and the treasures of experience ought to be worth something to their possessors and the world at large. Yet, it is a strange fact that, in the clerical profession, these things are not valued as they are in the professions of medicine and law, and in all the solid vocations of life. Vivacity and wit too often command a higher premium than gravity and wisdom. I do not believe that the Church of Christ at large is responsible for this error. It is rather the fault of a few ambitious spirits, actuated by worldly motives,
who appear to think that they must conduct the affairs of a Christian Church as they would manage an operouse or a theatre.

But, it is time to draw these discursive remarks to a close. Our text commands us to “ask now of the days that are past.” Moses impressed upon the children of Israel, the value of their national history, every event of which was to be remembered and studied in the light of a probationary and disciplinary Providence. What important and thrilling events have filled the history of the last twenty years! The connection of the two hemispheres by the electric cable, the completion of an iron pathway across this Continent, the union of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean—opening a passage for ships to India through the desert of Arabia, the removal of serfdom from Russia and slavery from America; these dreams of the past are now sober realities which God hath wrought and we are to use for His glory. The past few years have made us familiar with events in our own land which a generation cannot forget. The most relentless civil conflict, the bloodiest battles, the most horrid atrocities, the most cruel murders, the most destructive earthquakes, fires, floods, explosions, shipwrecks, and nameless disasters of modern times have happened within a score of years. By the side of these, we have a record of the brightest achievements of science and philanthropy, the richest endowments of religious and educational institutions, the most comprehensive plans for meliorating the condition of suffering humanity, and the noblest efforts for the universal triumph of the Christian religion.

I have alluded to the changes time has wrought. Death has also done his work. When I look over the
records of our church for the last twenty years, what a checkered scene passes before my mind! I read the first name,—an honored one,—on the list of families for 1850. Father and mother and son are gone. A few members of the family survive. I read another,—a beloved name; the father is cut off in the midst of great usefulness; a son is slain on the field of battle; a daughter is laid in an early grave. Thus we might sum up the history of many a once happy household. If all the dead who have worshipped within these walls had been laid to rest in one burial-ground, what a tender interest would cluster around the sacred spot!

We should find the tombs of some old disciples. Read the inscriptions: Ann Lutkins, aged 76; Clara Cobb, 77; Abigail Gallaudet, 84; Mary Brower, 86; Ellen Caldwell, 69; Susan Roy, 87; John Bloomfield, 74; Eliza Barrow, 79; Rebekah Horton, 86; Ann Oldis, 80; Ann Mabee, 92. Here are eleven whose added ages amount to 890 years.

As we walk on, we read the names of beloved young Christians: Eliza B. Day, Mary Louisa Shackelton, Marietta Melvaine, Stephen Decatur Wickware, Alexander Irving, Morison W. Allen, Albert A. J. Goessling.

Here are the names of others who loved the Church, and died in the faith, some having passed through great tribulations: Mrs. Martha Boyce, Mrs. Eliza Steenburgh, Mrs. Sarah Berry, Mrs. Mary Lauder, Mrs. Maria Morris, Mrs. Eliza Mills, Agnes Gopsill, Emeline Davenport, Benjamin Underhill, Mrs. Margaret James, Mrs. Letty Vanderbeek, Mrs. Ellen Hardenbergh, Mrs. Elizabeth Johnson, Mrs. Annie Gustin, Mrs. Almira Thomas, Jane Agnes Millar, Mrs. Phebe Day, Frederick Platt, Mrs. Mary Jane Simpson, Mrs. Olivia C. Davey,
Mrs. Celia Ann Main, Thomas Ward and his wife Elizabeth, Mrs. Emma Camp, Mrs. Phebe Cobb, Esther Hogan, Henry C. Stacy, Henry E. Kutzmeyer, Susan Rarick, Mrs. Margaret Miller, Mrs. Sarah Trapahagen, Mrs. Mary S. Stryker, Mrs. Anna F. Shackelton, Mrs. Jane W. Webster, Mrs. Catalina Van Cleef, Mrs. Anna Rudderow, Mrs. Jane M. Mackay.

Here also sleep the honored officers of the church who once filled these seats: Cornelius P. Brokew, Stephen Garretson, Louis D. Hardenbergh, John V. Brower, who was the bearer of my call, Earl B. Sippell, John Berry, Jacob P. Kline, Louis F. Day, Thomas B. Tompson, George S. Corwin, B. W. Ryder, Jacob R. Wortendyke. We would like to call up some reminiscences of these departed brethren, but time forbids. And here are the graves of others identified with the earliest history of the Church: Cornelius Van Vorst, James Morrison, Edward Corwin, Benjamin Davey, Alexander Love, Robert McLaughlin, Daniel Fielding, Joseph Van Doren, John A. Gwinner, Samuel T. Halsey, Stephen Bogardus.

Here too are many little graves that tell of "empty cribs," and vacant chairs, and silent halls at home. We miss them on earth, but "of such is the kingdom of heaven." Among these monuments to departed friends is one that reminds us of our mutual loss. The name it bears has ever been associated with that of your pastor, in your thoughts and prayers. It is a sweet satisfaction to believe that her memory will be cherished with affection in other households than the stricken one of which she was the light and joy.

With mingled emotions of grief for our loss, and gladness over their unspeakable gain, we have recounted the names of departed loved ones; while—
“Fond memory to her duty true,
Brings back their faded forms to view;
How life-like through the mist of years,
Each well-remembered face appears.”

And, how suddenly does the kaleidoscope of life sometimes change its combinations and present new scenes! Perhaps no one has a better opportunity to see this than the pastor. Often have I been called from absorbing study to visit the sick and dying, and then to pass from the house of mourning and the solemn grave, where every feeling of the heart was wrought up to the highest key of sympathy, directly to the place where the occasion called for emotions the very opposite—from the burial to the bridal scene—from the sombre apartment where the dim light just revealed the contrast between the black habiliments of the living mourners and the white robes of the dead, to the brilliantly illumed parlor where blazing gas-lights fell on dazzling robes and flashing diamonds. When you remember that your pastor is called to these sudden transitions, not simply as a cold spectator, but is expected to enter into full sympathy with the occasion, to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice, you can imagine the tension and the pressure upon his emotional, as well as upon his moral nature. From this standpoint, which few can occupy, I have seen during these years, the marvelous dealings of Providence with all the families connected with this church.

And now we have “asked of the days of the past;” what do they answer? They tell us that “the time is short.” Twenty years! Nearly one-third of man’s allotted term. Some of you, my brethren, have been during all this period and longer, working in the Master’s vineyard. Yet, how like a dream seems the past!
How little we have done! We feel that we have just begun to live, and are every day resolving to summon new zeal and energy. And this we have been doing for many years, and will continue to do until this frail, unprofitable life shall end.

They tell us that we must meet the record of these years at the judgment. As we have sown, we shall reap. For every idle word we must give account to God.

These days of the past remind us of many disappointed hopes; many broken vows; many forgotten mercies; many unsanctified afflictions. They call us, with solemn voice, to repentance and reconciliation with God. Some of you stand, today, just where you did twenty years ago. During all this time you have listened to the invitations and warnings of the Gospel, and have not yielded your hearts to Christ. God has waited long for fruit. For twenty years the Intercessor has said of the barren fig-tree, "Let it alone this year also." Can the patience of God be expected to hold out much longer? The hour must come when he will say: "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" and it may come this very year. Amid all the changes that have occurred, one thing, alas! seems to have become fixed; that is, the careless impenitence of many among you. Is this to last forever? The days of the past are beyond recall; the future is not yours. Would it not now be a satisfaction to look back on twenty years of faithful service given to Christ, instead of twenty years spent in worldly pursuits, money-getting, and pleasure-seeking? If you have never heard before, hear now the call of God. Your sun is in mid-heaven, or past the zenith; and, when the sun begins to set, how rapidly it sinks, especially when we have
so much work yet to do, neglected in the morning. Dear friends still out of Christ, the night will overtake you very soon, and then man’s work must cease. Let the time past suffice for the world and for self. Give all the future and the present to God. “Now is the accepted time; to-day is the day of salvation.”

The days of the past admonish us to quicken our pace in the Christian course. We should be thankful that God has spared us to work so long in His vineyard. How many have been called to rest in the early morning, some whose names we may recall; but we are still here, many of us, bearing the burden and heat of the day. It is a privilege to live and labor for Christ. I assure you, my dear friends, the service of Christ is a blessed service; and you who have been at the post of duty here nearly as long as myself, or who have served the Master in other fields, can bear your testimony to this truth. It is sweet to think of heaven as a place of rest. There our loved companions and friends are with Jesus. Toil is ended, suffering is over, weariness is unknown, but idleness is not tolerated there. How can they talk of rest in heaven, who have never labored for Christ on earth? “They serve Him day and night” in that blessed land of rest. Be ashamed, ye that are weary in well-doing, and are taking your rest while the sun is yet high above the horizon, and the Master’s work is too much for the toiling laborers. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” The day is waning; double your diligence. Labor more, pray more, give more than you have ever done, for you are nearing the shore where you must lay down your implements of toil, and your weapons of war; your money, your bonds and title-deeds, and all that you have inherited
or accumulated, and naked and empty-handed you must pass the river of death. And now, beloved brethren of the Consistory, beloved fellow-laborers in the Sunday-school, beloved fellow-Christians and friends, dear youth and children, let us all, together thank God for the place He has given us in His church, and for all the blessings we have received through the Gospel. I rejoice that I have been so long the pastor of this church. Twenty happier years were never allotted to any pastor. Nothing has ever occurred to disturb our peace and harmony. Our Consistory meetings have always been characterized by the most fraternal spirit. Through all those stormy years of political and war excitement, when many churches were torn to pieces, I never had reason to doubt the constant friendship and unabated confidence of all my people. I do not mention these things as reflecting any credit upon myself. They may be proofs of the want of that fidelity which sometimes awakens enmity, but I could never see any reason why brethren may not dwell together in unity. For the kindness and sympathy of my people at all times, and especially during that season of trial associated with the lingering illness and the death of my beloved wife, I have no language to express the feelings of my heart. Of all the links that bind loving hearts, none are so strong as those which are forged in the furnace of affliction.

And now, as we enter the portals of another year, from the days that are past we gain knowledge for the future. "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be, hath already been; and God requireth that which is past." With grateful recollections of the past, and cheerful hope for the future, let us address ourselves to the duties of the living present.