

“Shall Ye Know It?”

A Sermon Preached on the Occasion of the Rededication of Willow Church
on the Sabbath of September 4, 1891 by the Rev. Christian McShaffrey, M.Div.

“Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:18-19)

“Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old...” it is indeed a somewhat strange thing that the prophet seems here to be saying - is it not? For how could we not remember the former things? How could we not consider the things of old?

For here we sit today in a house of worship which hitherto-for was as useless to God as your barns and your stables! Yes, here we sit in a house designed to be a meeting place between God and his people... yet, again, hitherto-for only served as a boarding house for insects and vermin!

We might well therefore be tempted to “consider the things of old”, wondering, “What happened here? Who built this house of worship? Under what denomination did it exist? How many sermons were preached from this pulpit? How many baptisms administered in this font? How many marriages were solemnized before this altar?”

O, it would not be that difficult a thing to find such answers; and it would be far less difficult a thing for us to then fawn over such answers. Yes, I do suppose that through the process of considering these things of old, our hearts might indeed be stirred up and warmed with a certain romantic reminiscence of days long past...

But mark ye well the words of the prophet: “Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old.”

Why? Is there anything inherently wrong with such considerations? Is it not rather a good thing for us to remember God’s past faithfulness to build his church and bless his people in former times?

To be sure - ‘Tis a very good thing for us to remember what God has done in this church and through this church in times past...

But it is even better, I say, to look forward... forward in faith to what the Lord our God will yet do in this church and through this church! For he saith: “Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”

O, my friends, this is our present and most pressing need... for right now we are living in a wilderness and in a desert! O, no, not literally, but spiritually and intellectually and

morally! During the past 20 years the enemy of our souls has done a dark dark work across the sea.

Alas, that land which once stood as a bastion of Christian orthodoxy and as a light to the nations... even as the father of our nation... has all but turned its back on God and believed the lie!

Humanism, secularism, naturalism, industrialism, scriptural criticism, and now even this new and novel doctrine called darwinism... these false doctrines have all-but-crippled the churches of Europe.

And I had hoped, my friends, that some 3,000 miles of roaring sea would keep our shores safe from such things... but even now these same doctrines are being taught in our schools and seminaries. Which means that within the next decade -- by the year 1900 -- poison will probably be preached from nearly every pulpit in our land.

Yet here God promises - does he not - to make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert...? Yet here God promises to do a new thing - does he not? A new and a powerful thing -- that even now is about to spring forth?!

O, I do pray that you might excuse my overt - unapologetic - and even eschatological optimism on this point, but I am utterly and entirely convinced that the Lord our God -- in opening once again the doors of this house of prayer -- has done nothing less than open the flood gates of his own grace and power!

For wherever and whenever God is worshipped in accordance with the precepts contained in his holy word; grace and power shall spring forth! Wherever and whenever Prayer is offered in the name of Christ and through the merits of his blood; grace and power shall spring forth!

Wherever and whenever Scripture is preached in an orthodox and applicable manner; grace and power shall spring forth! Wherever and whenever the Sacraments are rightly administered by the church; grace and power shall spring forth!

O, there is no question in my mind, beloved, that God will do a new thing here in this church. The only question which remains yet un-answered is that which is here posed by the prophet: "Shall ye know it?"

That question, my friends, is one that only you can answer and I would beseech thee by the mercies of Christ to consider that question with all due diligence! For if you miss this new work of the Lord -- this way in the wilderness called infallible truth -- this river in the desert called irresistible grace -- then you will have missed everything!

O, my friends, do not satisfy your soul this day only by remembering and reminiscing... over the religious experiences and endeavors of people long dead...

No - Let God begin to do a new work in you... in your heart... in your home... in this chapel, yes... and in this village. Amen.