

Back to the Future

gMs+
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What were they thinking?

It was the first church here on these grounds, called the “Middle Church” and later called: “Walker’s Church” or “Belvoir Church”. It was a colonial-style wooden church. It was the church that Thomas Jefferson actually worshipped in. It was the church where his tutor, our rector James Maury, was buried *under the pulpit*. Yet, that church was removed...replaced...by another building, leaving Rev. Maury *buried in our front yard*.

The new church building was Grace. They replaced the original, American colonial, wooden building—with an expensive, stone, gothic revival, English building designed by a national architect! What were they thinking?! *They must have been thinking about...the future.*

And when that building later burned, and they re-built it, they had the audacity to add new things they’d never had before: the front alcoves, side altar, and chancel. What were they thinking?! *They must have been thinking about...the future.*

And when they installed the first pipe organ of Grace to be built on a scale to match the building, they closed up the gallery, blocking a view of the tower window from the nave *for the first time in a hundred years*. What were they thinking?! *They must have been thinking about...the future.*

We love places like Jefferson’s Monticello, Madison’s Montpelier, and Monroe’s Highland. We are just as historic. But we aren’t the same either. The caretakers of these presidential homes are entrusted to preserve them and go deeper and deeper into the history and past of these places. We love our history at Grace and, with the help of Barclay Rives and others past, we have gone deeper and deeper into our own past.

But we are not a monument to the past—we are—and we have always been—a living community in the Risen Christ—mindful of our past but always...*always...thinking about...the future...and how to be faithful in this given time, as best we can, for the future of those who shall come. And so, here we are again. This will be yet another chapter written, sooner or later. We would never have sought this, or even imagined it—this new future now before us—if accident had not befallen us—and if we hadn’t studied long and hard to see best what we should now do.*

In many ways, I do believe this organ project can be called, in sum: “Back to the Future”. It is a striking combination of historic restoration and innovative renovation. It is *far less daring* than the change from the original colonial building to this gothic structure. It is *perhaps less daring still* than the total change of the front of the church after the fire. Yes, it moves a commensurate-size organ from the gallery to the chancel. Yes, it closes off the alcoves, making possible the move of the organ from back to front. Yes, it enlarges the chancel and opens up nave floor space. These are innovative moves...*for the future.*

And yet at the same time, it restores again the view of the tower window from the nave. And, after over a hundred years, it finally finishes the chancel in the same gothic style as the nave. Not a change to the exterior is being made, even though our ancestors changed the exterior *twice* before us.

Compared to our ancestors’ daring, we *are* daring too—but *not quite so daring as they were*. But we are trying, in our own day, to honor the past, and *to do the best we can to prepare for a future*: A future of increased capacity for hospitality for weddings, baptisms, music and cultural events, and our own worship. A future of more ministry, in our long beloved tradition here, of bringing even more *beauty* to such a beautiful place as these lands of Cismont and Keswick. *What are we thinking? Yes, we are--like our ancestors before us--thinking about the future!*