So that he who says: I can shape my character outside the church as well as in; I can minister by myself in my own way to my own life,—is altogether likely, after the first enthusiasm, to find himself neglecting that which he honestly intended to perform. Solitude, whether social or spiritual, is excellent for an hour or a day; but it is not the natural state of human beings. All experience shows that we need society. Thoreau spent but a year in his seclusion at Walden Pond. The hermits stayed longer and fared worse. It is hard enough, under the best conditions, to live the life which is appropriate to a member of the family of God. He who tries to live apart from the rest of the family adds to the difficulties of which there are enough already. While he who resolutely, week by week, keeps in vital relation with the religious institution, and hears the word of exhortation and instruction, and takes upon his life the sentence of prayer and praise, is thereby helped and strengthened. He sees ideals clearer, and meets temptations better, and thinks higher thoughts. Is there any doubt about it? Is it not good philosophy? Is it not in accord with universal human nature?

The question, then, is how to be of service to the neighbor? And the answer is that every man may be of service in two ways: by his good example, and by his alliance with the great beneficial forces. For both these kinds of service there is an especial opportunity every Sunday morning.

For he who identifies himself with the Christian Church sets a good example. That is plain enough. He himself may be in much or little need of what the church can give him, but somebody else, who is affected by his example, needs the church and needs it imperatively. Somebody there is whose destiny may depend upon what he gets at church next Sunday. There he may hear a word in service or in sermon, or in the silence of his own soul, which will make an everlasting difference with him. As he turns the corner to the church, he will change the whole direction of his life. But he waits for you. He waits to see what turn you make, and when you pass by without going in, he follows in your steps. You say to him as plain as words, “The church is not worth while;” and he is obedient to that advice. Every citizen who stays at home on Sunday, forsaking the institution to live his individual life, hangs out a flag at his front door, inscribed, “The church is not worth while.” And the wider his influence in the community, the bigger the letters in which that legend is set forth. Every Sunday, every man in the neighborhood has a definite opportunity to serve his fellow men by his good example.

Here is the Christian Church with all its manifold shortcomings, with its weaknesses and sins, with its grievous divisions and contentions, with its neglected opportunities,—what other agency even remotely approaches it in its social possibilities or in its spiritual results. Here may the man of affairs consecrate his executive strength to the best service of his fellow man, to the marshalling of the hosts of God against the armies of the devil. Here may the scholar bring his wisdom and his devout pursuit of truth into relation with the daily needs of men. Here may the young man bring his manhood, bring his courage and his hope, bring his high enthusiasm, and devote it to the holiest of missions, beginning the week as the knight began his quest, with his sword and shield laid down before the altar.

We must confess, indeed, that the church is not everywhere a young man’s church. You may not feel at home in it. You may find that it is conservative when you desire to be progressive. Going out into your new life with large ideas, the church may seem remote and isolated and out of relation to the common day. Compel it then. Take it by storm. Do your best to make it what it ought to be.

Gentlemen of the Class of Nineteen Hundred, we cannot realize these ideals without you. They are worth realizing; that is plain. To make them effective in any community is to render a high service to humanity. A church into which men go to worship God, and out of which they come to serve their fellow men, is the best blessing that any neighborhood can have. Whether there shall be such a church in your neighborhood depends in large measure upon you. You desire to succeed. You look out today into the future praying for that, planning for that. And success means the culture of your character and the best use of your power. You need the Church even more than the church needs you. For your sake, for your brethren’s sake, you need to be added to the church.