

God's Completed Good Work

2nd Sun. in Advent – 12/08/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Philippians 1:2-11 Pastor Keith Besel

v.6, [Paul says,] **“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”**

Introduction

✘ This may seem like silly question to ask, but here it goes: How many of you have ever started a project that never got finished? Ok, but don't worry, I won't put you on the spot by asking who among us has the most unfinished projects sitting around at work or at home.

➔ We all know how this happens: you have the best of intentions when you start, but life ends up happening instead, and you move on to other things – or you vow that you'll still finish it “someday!” But still facts are facts: good intentions are just that – intentions. And your intent does not equal a job well done. In fact, we've all heard that famous saying, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions” right? Thankfully though, our God is not just about good intentions.

✘ He always has, and always will complete whatever He has started. In Isaiah 55:11 Yahweh says, “...My word...shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” That's how it was in Genesis when God spoke the entire universe into being and it's still the same today with His creative Word – because His truth has not, and cannot change...ever.

➔ That's how St. Paul can be so “sure of this” in verse six, “that [God] who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

I. What's the Good Work God has begun?

✘ So, what is this “good work” that God has begun “in you all?” And that “you”, by the way, is a plural, so it's God's “good work” created within all of us together as His body of believers; His Church.

➔ Paul uses similar language in Ephesians 2:8-10, using the plural “you” again when he says, “For by grace you all have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

➔ Did you notice what Paul calls us there as Christ's believers? “We are [God's] ‘workmanship’.” The best translation is that we are God's “work of art.” You see, God didn't just create the world, He's the craftsman that brought the world into being; the best-of-the-best artists, who loves to create truly unique pieces of art.

✘ In Genesis, after each one of His creative days, God pronounced His work of art to be “good.” But in day six, after He created mankind with His bare hands, He pronounced us and everything else to be “very good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

➔ But God's greatest good work is His work of redeeming His Creation after we corrupted and defiled it with our sin. He began that saving work when He sent His Son, Jesus physically into the world with human flesh, to live without sin, yet to suffer and die to pay for our sin and then rise in victory over death and devil to take away their power over us. That's the “good work” He “began.”

➔ But He began it “in” you and me; that is, inside of each and every believer when He infused that saving work of Jesus into our hearts, minds and souls as His gift of faith through water, Word and Holy Spirit at our baptism.

- ⊗ And just as Ephesians 2:8-9 makes crystal clear, this is not a good work where we have done anything to earn God's favor. It is entirely the Craftsman's good work that He did to make us His children; not adults of God, but His children.
 - That's an important distinction, because children are meant to be molded; nurtured and shaped by their parents, who were given the awesome privilege of being God's instruments. You could say we are the "power tools" that He uses to create, nurture, care for and prepare His children to participate themselves then in God's Kingdom work.
 - Children also have that innocent trust – at least early on, that whatever their parents are doing for them, they do for their good. It's the same with our heavenly Father.
- ⊗ This is why He commands Christian parents, through the Church to bring His children to Him in baptism, where He then begins His work; giving His gift of faith; faith in Jesus' saving work for our redemption.
 - And the ultimate goal of faith is our salvation.
 - But another goal of faith after that is the good works that God – the Artist, has prepared and crafted for us to do. Paul says in verse nine of our text, "It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment." You see, we now live out God's work of faith as He designed it for us when we express and share His unconditional and immeasurable love with others.

II. Forces in our lives/world don't want His good work completed.

- ⊗ But friends, there are forces in our lives and in this world that don't want God's good work to come to His planned completion.
 - And that means they will always be at work trying to keep us from doing God's intended good work. They think if they can somehow stop you and me, then they can stop God.
- ⊗ There's the true story of an LCMS pastor, back when he was at the seminary, who had this truth confirmed directly. He happened to meet an actual practicing witch who told him, point blank that she was praying specifically for the downfall of Christian pastors. He said, "I was a bit shocked, not only because I had come face to face with a witch but also because she told me that she was actively praying for my downfall."
 - But those kind of realities shouldn't surprise us, because Jesus warned us that opposition and conflict because of our faith in Jesus will not stop coming at us this side of eternity.
 - The third-century African bishop Cyprian knew this from firsthand experience. He told his people, who lived in the prosperous city of Carthage, "Our warfare is with greed, with immodesty, with anger, with ambition. On top of that, there is our diligent but toilsome wrestling with [fleshly desires], with the enticements of the world. The mind of man, besieged by – and in every quarter infested with – the onslaughts of the devil, can hardly meet (all) the various points of attack (and) scarcely resist them. If greed is humbled, lust springs up. If lust is overcome, ambition takes its place. ... Pride puffs up, drunkenness entices, envy breaks unity, jealousy severs friendships. ... There are so many persecutions the soul suffers daily; with so many risks our hearts are wearied, and yet it delights to abide here (on earth) long among the devil's weapons" (adapted from Cyprian, On Mortality 4–5).
- ⊗ When we face these kinds of opposition, the devil's goal is to replace our faith with doubt. But you see it's here; in the face of such hostility that God can really bring the good work He started in us to completion at the day of Christ Jesus?

→ Satan has been recruiting his allies for a long time. Our sin-soaked culture, along with our sin-corrupted atmosphere and our own sinful flesh are all his evil tools used to tear apart the work that God has begun within us.

→ And because of this, there are times that God has to do His further, corrective and disciplining work inside of us, which can certainly be painful. Yet Proverbs 3:11-12 directs us, saying, "...do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of His reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."

⊗ I've heard people – more than one of you here today, who after surgery, began physical therapy, and then declared something like this, "If I had known the therapy was going to hurt this much, I would have just chosen never to walk again" or "If I had known cutting through my sternum was going to hurt like this, I wouldn't have let them repair my heart." But without the surgery/therapy, that hip replacement will never work; that broken bone will never mend; that heart will then fail.

→ And believe me, I am not making light of your pain or your struggles. I only use this as an example of God's far greater spiritual therapy when the only way He can complete His saving work of redemption within us is to discipline us; to allow the necessary consequences of our sinful actions to bring us through significant pain and difficulty so that we will then be open to and receive His gift of repentance in which God then restores our faith in Christ and keeps us in His work of redemption.

III. God will bring His work to completion!

⊗ Why? because, although Jesus proclaimed His work to be "finished" on the cross, the application of His redemptive work for each one of us in eternity is still to be completed.

→ And again, that too is still all God's work. Paul says in Philippians 2:13 that "it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

→ He's the one who made us and brought us into this world, not us. So, when we break spiritually, He's the one that knows what "repairs" need to take place. Once that pastor who heard the witch say she was praying for his demise, got over his initial shock, he was able to confidently reply, "Well then, give it your best shot."

⊗ Folks, you and I can have this same confidence in Jesus. That's what Paul is trying to tell us today in verse six. He says, "I am sure" God will complete His saving work in you all as His redeemed children.

→ There is no one, and nothing that can stand up to the power of our Creator; the one who crafted us to be His piece of art!

⊗ I mean, look at all He has endured to bring us into His family. In order to sculpt and craft us, He first allowed Himself to be disfigured, defaced, broken to pieces by His own creatures; those who were acting as Satan's demolition tools.

→ Then, for our salvation, He took our sins on Himself so they would be killed with Him on the cross. But the Father would not let His Son's pain, suffering, and death, at Satan's hand, have the final word. No, Jesus rose victorious in His strife for those He came to save.

→ And then, He used His instrument; His "means" of baptism to fill us with His grace; to bind us together with Jesus' death and resurrection; to drown the old sinful Adam in each of us and bring to life the new Adam so that, as Paul says in verse 10 we will be seen by God as "pure and blameless at the day of Christ".

⊗ It is then that God, the great Craftsman's masterpiece will be completed; on that final day when He comes with all His holy angels as promised and He finishes what He started; making you

and me and all of His precious children in His Church as the pure and blameless “fruit of His righteousness”, just as Paul says in verse 11.

→ Until that day, Paul assures us in verse nine that God continues to work within us, through His Spirit, guiding us so “that [our] love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”

- ⌘ What’s that look like? Well, He reminds us here in worship and through His Word of His saving work in our baptism. He feeds and forgives us here at this altar with His true body and blood. And He blesses us with each other in the same “partnership in the gospel” that Paul and the Philippian Christians had – watching God work in and through each other – for the support of each other as brothers and sisters in the faith.

Conclusion

- ⌘ It’s in this love of Christ then, that we, like the Philippians live each day, eager for “the day of Christ” to come; in full confidence that He who began this work will bring it to completion on that day, “to the glory and praise of God” (v.11). Amen.