

“Putting It All Together” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Advent 2 December 8, 2024

- I. **Philippians 1:6** - ⁶And 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.
- II. **The Cathedral of Notre-Dame reopened this weekend in Paris, France.**
 - a. The fire that destroyed much of its structure in 2019 was met with almost a billion dollars in donations to repair it within 5 years...
 - i. The opening church service was today, and many world leaders attended all the ceremonies in honor of the completion.
 - b. However, there is another cathedral I would like to bring to your attention today... it's in New York City and is called the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine.
 - i. It has a nickname... as many people call it the “Cathedral of Saint John the Unfinished.”
 - ii. As one of the largest cathedrals in New York, the Episcopal Church began building it in 1892.
 - iii. Although the congregation started worshiping there in 1899, it took them until 1941 to open the entire church building... but even then, the work was far from completed.
 1. It seems that many hardships have plagued the project, including financial problems, delays from World War 2, engineering problems, and even a fire in 2001.
 2. So, here we are, 132 years after they started construction, and this massive church is still called “Saint John the Unfinished.”
 - c. Perhaps you have a bunch of projects with a similar name.
 - i. Some of you might have a bathroom remodel and could name it “John the Unfinished”.
 - ii. Or, maybe you started a landscaping project that you call “Back Yard the Unfinished”.
 - iii. Pick whatever you want, whether it's a craft or art project, an old car restoration, a kitchen remodel, or any other thing – if it ends with “...the Unfinished”, we hate it every time someone reminds us that we've left this thing undone.
 - iv. I suppose it's because we feel undisciplined or lazy when we don't finish our projects – or maybe we wonder why we even started them at all.
- III. **When it comes to God, none of this applies to His unfinished work.**
 - a. Just imagine God as the Great Architect, who created all things and gives them life.
 - b. Yet, He has many unfinished projects that He absolutely intends to finish.
 - c. As St. Paul writes to the Philippian Church today, much like last week's letter to the Thessalonians, he is encouraging them to keep living for Jesus.

- i. He thanks God for his memories of the people in this church (v 3), and their active participation in the Gospel with him. (v 5)
 - ii. Then he says that he's convinced that God will finish the work that He began in the Philippians. (v 6)
 - d. What kind of work did God, the Great Architect, start in the Philippians that He needed to finish?
 - i. Of course, the first thing God did was create these people and all of us... He did the work of giving us life.... But there is always something missing from the moment life begins in all human beings.
 - 1. Every person is born with sin, no one is able to know God or give Him glory without something else He provides... faith.
 - 2. Faith is God's good work in us – not ours – but God's good work in us that He places in our hearts by the power of the Word and Baptism.
 - 3. As it says in Ephesians that we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but by grace through faith we have been saved, and this is not of our own doing; it is the gift of God, not by our own works, so we cannot brag about it. (Ephesians 2:1; 8-9)
 - 4. No, faith is God's good work that He began in us...

IV. **Yet, we know that God's work always faces opposition too.**

- a. The cathedral of "St. John the Unfinished" is nicknamed that because of years of financial problems, wars, and a fire.
- b. Maybe we could put our names in there as those who are unfinished... Pastor Jim the Unfinished, Brad the Unfinished, *Your Name* the Unfinished...
 - i. Sure, the Supreme Architect has begun the work of giving us faith, but we face the opposition of trials and tribulations.
 - ii. Sometimes it comes in the form of financial difficulties.
 - iii. Other times we are hit with a health problem that puts life on hold.
 - iv. Some of us experience the loss of a loved one, and our plans for building a future with them ends.
 - v. Life may throw us divorces... unplanned pregnancies... addictions... or job loss... and our lives are in so much turmoil that we can't imagine growing or having God build upon such a mess.
 - vi. It's easy to get down when we think about how unfinished we are... how much work still needs to be done.
- c. Yet, I would like you to consider "St. John the Unfinished" as it was put into service in 1899... the people worshiped there... they served the Lord in that community... the building is unfinished, but is still working for God after more than 100 years.
 - i. Yes, we are unfinished, but by His grace through our faith, we still live for Him anyway.

V. **God's grace is the whole point of our season of Advent!**

- a. The Great Architect planned a mission of redemption through Jesus, as He sent His Son through all kinds of turmoil and trials...
 - i. It started with an unplanned pregnancy... a near divorce between Joseph and Mary... a birth far from home... a tyrant trying to murder the new baby... and once Jesus was grown the religious leaders opposed Him at every turn... a different tyrant executed His relative, John the Baptist...and ended with Jesus hanging on the cross.
 - 1. From that place, Jesus cried... “It is finished...” or, “It is completed.”
 - 2. Jesus was always perfect and complete, but He died to pass that gift on to us...
 - 3. It was messy and awful, but it was the Great Architect’s plan to redeem us and even bring us to completion one day.
 - ii. Jesus’ sacrifice became the victory that would make the opposition weak and ultimately powerless in the end.
 - 1. His death and resurrection won the battle that would just tear us to pieces... and nothing can destroy us now.
 - 2. Are we completely restored?
 - a. Not yet, but this is Paul’s prayer – that God would bring to completion what He began in Jesus – as our faith brings us into His presence forever at our death... or on the Last Day.

VI. **We all struggle with troubles and challenges.**

- a. Struggles are not a sign that God is not at work.
- b. As Christians, God gave us faith, and this means we are constantly being built up by the Great Architect... we are a work in progress.
- c. In fact, Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
 - i. Yes, God began a good work in us by giving us faith, and this faith will naturally produce good works for Him... even if we are a work in progress!
 - ii. This is Paul’s prayer for the Philippians too – “⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (v 9-11)
 - iii. All of these good things come from faith... especially that our love might abound more and more.
- d. Some of the most amazing things have taken place by people who are broken, battered, and look like they need a complete restoration.

- i. Time and time again I have ministered to people on their death beds who still showed their love, shared their faith, prayed their hearts out, and somehow ministered to the people around them.
- ii. We are each part of the unfinished... but because of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, our completion is not far off...
- e. No matter how tough things get, remember that our God is putting it all together... bringing us to completion. Amen.