

GOD WILL FINISH IT

(Philippians 1:3-11)

Intro: I am confident of this:

- One who began a good work among you,
 - Will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.
- #Philippians 1:6.

I share a common trait with some of you.

- I can be a compulsive person.
- I like to finish what I start.

#If I'm working in my yard.

- *I don't mow half of it.
- *I mow the whole thing.
- *And I trim.
- *And I sweep.

+I don't like to quit until I'm finished.

#If I'm writing a sermon.

- *I often work right through lunch.
- +On Fridays.

*I don't like to quit until I'm finished.

+Sandy Isakson's interruptions notwithstanding.

#Some tasks are not so easily finished.

*When I travel.

+I take pictures.

=Lots of pictures.

=Lots and lots and lots of pictures.

-Around 1300 pictures.

#On my trip to Florida.

*In October.

+Processing those pictures.

=Can be a multi-step project.

-Deleting the ones that are obvious duds.

-Uploading the rest of them into my computer.

#When I get home.

-Sorting them into different files.

#All of the pictures from Key West.

*In one file.

#All of the pictures from the Dry Tortugas.

*In another file.

#All of the pictures from the Everglades.

*In yet another file.

- Tweaking the pictures.
 - #For optimum:
 - *Contrast.
 - *Color.
 - *Brightness.
- Selecting those I want made into prints.
 - #Emailing them to Walgreens.
- Arranging the prints in a photo album.
 - #Labeling them.
 - *Date.
 - *Place.
- =All of that took awhile.
 - Evenings.
 - Days off.
 - Few holidays.
 - #Took a month.
 - #I like to finish what I start.
 - #I can be a bit compulsive that way.
- But I'm not obsessive-compulsive.
 - #I don't think.
 - #I did do other things during that month.
 - *I came to work.
 - *I rode my bicycle.
 - *I mulched my leaves.
 - *I put up my Christmas tree.
 - *I did my laundry.
 - *I watched a football game.
 - +Or two.
 - +Or three.
 - +Or four.
 - +Or more.
 - *But all the while.
 - +I kept coming back to my pictures.
 - +I wanted to finish what I started.
 - #I've been known to read two or three books at once.
 - *It's not that I have to finish one.
 - +Before I can start another.
 - =I'm not obsessive-compulsive in that way.
 - *But a book has to be really, really bad.
 - +For me not to finish it.
 - +I like to finish what I start.

I. God Is Going To Finish What God Has Started.

A. So Says St. Paul To The Philippians.

1. Could there be any doubt?

- a. That God would finish what God started.
- b. Apparently there was.

2. Philippian congregation was relatively young.

- a. Maybe 5 or 6 years old.

-At the time Paul was writing to them.

- b. Things were not going as well as some might have hoped.

-Some folks were focused on:

#Food.

#Other material things.

*Philippians 3: 19.

#Rather than their Gospel mission.

-There was internal squabbling.

#As evidenced by a dispute between Euodia and Syntyche.

*Philippians 4: 2-9.

-Where was their fearless leader?

#St. Paul.

#He was in prison.

*Philippians 1: 7, 13.

#They were sending Paul money.

*Philippians 4: 18.

#Paul was sending them:

*Advice.

*Encouragement.

+ In the form of this letter.

-But maybe they thought their days as a congregation.

#Were numbered.

*Pastor Jean DeVoll-Donaldson.

+Assistant to the Bishop.

= In the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod.

*Has used a bell curve.

+To remind us of the cycle of life.

=We're born.

=We grow.

=We mature.

=We decline.

=We die.

+That's true for:

=You.

=Me.

=Congregations.

- Unless there is a process:
 - #Of congregational renewal.
 - *To transform decline.
 - +Into a new cycle of growth.
 - #Death is inevitable.
- I'm hopeful.
 - #Our conversations about merger.
 - *Might be a catalyst for that renewal.
 - #Don't expect a merger.
 - *Of two declining organizations.
 - +To do that automatically.
 - #But maybe this can be the occasion.
 - *For us to focus on transformation.
 - +Not simply survival.
- #Perhaps the Philippian congregation.
 - *Was already seeing the writing on the wall.
 - +Even though they were a young congregation.
 - +Wondering if they had a future.

B. So St. Paul Speaks To Them A Word Of Promise.

1. I am confident of this:
 - a. One who began a good work among you,
 - b. Will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

-Philippians 1:6.
2. Paul's confidence.
 - a. Not in:
 - Himself.
 - #He's in jail.
 - Philippians.
 - #They had their own issues.
 - b. But in God.
 - Who began a good work among the Philippians.
 - #When they were brought to faith.
 - #When their congregation was founded.
 - Who finishes what he starts.

II. Where Is Our Confidence?

A. As We Begin A New Church Year.

1. As we have made another transformation.
 - a. From the end of time.
 - b. To a new beginning.
2. If our banner were to be more true to life.
 - a. It would not simply flow:
 - From beginning to end.
 - From Advent to Christ the King.
 - b. It would flow:
 - In a giant circle.
 - From beginning to end to beginning again.
3. We hear again the voice of John the Baptizer.
 - a. Crying in the wilderness:
 - “Prepare the way of the Lord.”
 - #Luke 3:4.
 - b. But who is it?
 - Who fills in the valleys.
 - Who lowers the mountains.
 - Who makes the crooked places straight.
 - Who makes the rough places smooth.
 - #Luke 3:5.
 - c. Who is it?
 - Who brings to birth the savior of the world.
 - d. Who is it?
 - Who raises that savior back to life.
 - #After he’s been crucified.
 - #After he’s said:
 - *From the cross.
 - +“It is finished.”
 - =John 19:30.
 - e. Who is it?
 - Who is going to finish what he started.
 - #By the day of Jesus Christ.
 - #When all flesh shall see the salvation of God.
 - *Luke 3:6.
 - f. I am confident:
 - One who began a good work among you,
 - Will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.
 - #Philippians 1:6.

B. In The Meantime.

1. There are preparations to be made.
 - a. Sins to be cleansed.
 - b. Sinners to be purified.
2. We all have a roll to play.
 - a. As messengers.
 - b. As did:
 - Malachi.
 - #Whose name means:
 - *"My Messenger."
 - John the Baptizer.
 - St. Paul.
 - Philippians.
 - c. As did:
 - Charter members of this congregation.
 - #Whose numbers are shrinking year by year.
 - Those whose membership can be measured in decades.
 - #I was visiting Doyle Hill this week.
 - *At Forest Hills.
 - +In Broken Arrow.
 - *We got to talking:
 - +About how long he has been a member of Ascension.
 - *I couldn't remember:
 - +If he was a charter member or not.
 - =There is a list of names.
 - Of the charter members.
 - On the display case.
 - #In the elevator lobby.
 - #On the first floor.
 - *Doyle didn't think he was a charter member.
 - +He wasn't.
 - =I looked him up.
 - In my handy-dandy membership book.
 - #Names.
 - #Dates.
 - Mary Faulkner has compiled for me.
 - +He joined in 1956.
 - =Year after the establishment of Ascension.
 - +But he's had a roll to play for many years.
 - d. As will those who will be around.
 - Long after some of us are gone.
 - #Merger or no merger.
 - #Ascension or no Ascension.

3. How can I be so sure?
 - a. I know the promise.
 - One who began a good work among you,
 - Will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.
 - b. I have seen the promise fulfilled.
 - When I was a chaplain.
 - #Part of my job was planting seeds (faith/comfort/hope).
 - *Sometimes I saw those seeds grow.
 - *Sometimes I didn't.
 - #Average stay in the jail.
 - *About nine months.
 - *Record was five years.
 - +An unconscionable length of time.
 - =For someone who was pre-trial.
 - *But in:
 - +Nine months.
 - +Year.
 - +Two years.
 - +Five years.
 - =I could often see those seeds begin to grow.
 - *Some of my prison pen pals still stay in touch.
 - +Even after 20 years.
 - =I've seen the seeds grow.
 - #Average stay in the hospital.
 - *About three days.
 - +On most of the floors.
 - *Often less than 24 hours.
 - +On the labor and delivery floor.
 - *On many occasions.
 - +I saw patients just one time.
 - =Then they were gone.
 - +I often had but one chance to plant a seed.
 - =I didn't always know:
 - If it took root.
 - If it grew.
 - =Sometimes I did know.
 - I might run into some of those patients:
 - #Back in the hospital.
 - #In a medical clinic.
 - #On the street.
 - I might not:
 - #Remember them.
 - #Recognize them.

- But they would:
 - #Remember me.
 - #Tell me:
 - *"What you said to me in the hospital,"
 - *"Was just what I needed to hear."
 - #Feedback like that can be reassuring.

- c. But what's most important is trust in the promise.
 - That it's not simply:
 - #My words.
 - #Opportunity for me to see my words bear fruit.
 - But to believe the promises of God's Word:
 - #One who began a good work among you,
 - #Will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

- Concl: As some of you deal with:
- Family issues.
 - Financial challenges.
 - Health problems.
 - #Maybe you wonder:
 - *Where is God in all of this?
 - *How will this all turn out?

- As you wrestle with life's uncertainties.
- Be confident.
 - #One who began a good work in you,
 - *In the waters of Holy Baptism.
 - #Will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.
 - *God finishes what God starts.

