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Pentecost 09 –August 7, 2022

“Called to Finish What Is Finished”

Read: Colossians 1: 21 - 29/ Memorize: Colossians 1: 24

The overarching theme of the Bible is the redemption of the world from sin. That theme is woven into the fabric of scripture. Paul repeats that theme in Colossians, affirming that God’s redemption is the love gift of His Son, Jesus Christ on the cross. Oddly enough, Paul says we are called to finish Christ’s redemptive work in this world.

That’s where the sermon title comes from, “To Finish What is Finished.” Jesus is central to our faith. The connection between Jesus and the Church is vital. We are to bring the message of His reconciliation and recreation in and through us to those who don’t know it.

If we are going to finish what is finished, that is if Christ’s ministry of reconciliation is to go on through you and me, then we must remember who we are. In Colossians 1: 21 & 22, he’s saying: “You were once ..Christ’s spiritual enemies – strangers to God, hostile in mind, yet He has now reconciled you through Jesus.”

Martin Luther insisted that people must confront their sinfulness in all its ravishing depths before they can enjoy the comforts of salvation. If we don’t understand our need for forgiveness, we won’t really appreciate the greatness of that forgiveness.

At the same time, we want to be very careful. We cannot scare the hell out of people. God calls us to love people into heaven, rather than scare them out of hell.

So who are we? We are forgiven sinners through the grace of God alone. Without that grace, we would return to being alienated and enemies of God. But to forget who we are and who we have been is a doorway to spiritual pride. It becomes a roadblock to spiritual growth.

Forgiven sinners recognize that they need to turn to Jesus every day because they still have the capacity for sin. Because of God’s grace they are recipients of His

forgiveness. We are reminded that Jesus lives in us through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

As we read the Epistles of Paul we know that he soars to the heights in his efforts to describe the person and the work of Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God. And here's a line that helps us to understand what it means when we say we are called to finish what is finished, "in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." In Jesus, God has written Himself into history.

The Bible talks of Jesus as the firstborn of all creation. He is prior to everything and superior to everything else. He has primacy over all things. As we remember from the Gospel of John, "all things were created by Him and for Him." It is only in Him that creation has its meaning and He is the answer to all the big questions.

Yet this preeminent, cosmic Christ is our personal Savior. Paul is reminding the Colossians that this resurrected Christ came to them through the teaching of Epaphras. He came to people who were alienated, not friends. He came because He is "the one in whom we have redemption."

And that brings us to the crucial point of our sermon title: "Called to Finish What is Finished." In verse 24 Paul says: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the church."

Paul is saying that Jesus has passed on the work of reconciliation to us. That may mean that we have to suffer for those who don't know Jesus' love, even if it means that we are going to bear a cross.

Now that phrase "what is lacking in Christ's affliction" might surprise you. Can anything be lacking in what Jesus did? It sounds almost irreverent to even ask the question. The Greek word behind it is not that Jesus didn't do what He needed to do, but that there are still things to be done.

We don't want to misunderstand this that Jesus' work of salvation is incomplete. There is nothing lacking in His redemptive work. He took our place, suffered our death so that we might not have to die eternally. The incredible thing is that, if only one person in the world needed it, Jesus would have died for that one person.

We know we are separated from God by our sin. The Good News of Jesus Christ is that He extends His grace to overcome our sins. Paul wanted the Colossians and us to know the power of the cross. We hear in verse 19, “For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him ...” “and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.” So in Jesus everything of God was fulfilled.

So what are we called to finish, if Jesus did it all? We are to allow the fullness of Christ’s love to fill up the empty places in our lives which are still untouched by the cross. That’s the first thing that God wants us to do. When we do that we can become channels of Christ’s love to flow into the empty places of others’ hearts, that their salvation may be complete.

Just think about the places in your heart and life that are untouched by the fullness of Christ. They’re the places that you keep closed off from Jesus. They’re the places where you have been hurt by someone, and rather than forgiving them, you’re holding on to the hurt. That allows it to fester in you and then seep out into other parts of your life.

That’s the part that Jesus wants to fill up so that you can forgive and not be consumed by the hurt you’re holding onto. That story can be repeated in all sorts of areas in our lives: our addictions of all kinds; our need for the approval of others, that leads us to turn ourselves into chameleons, being and doing what we think will please others so they will like us.

Our insatiable desire for happiness, which we frequently think will come through things like status, which, in turn make us driven people who can’t recognize happiness when it could be ours and our fears of all kinds. These are all the empty and barren places that can be touched and made complete when we are filled up by the cross, the fullness of Jesus’ love.

By faith, we know we are loved and forgiven; are made right with God through Jesus. We are freed from the guilt and remorse that can cause us to be separated from Jesus. That fullness comes as we allow Jesus to fill up all the empty places that are still untouched by the cross in our lives.

The completed work of the cross must be completed within us. To do that we want to look inward; be radically honest with ourselves and our Lord. Remember the words of

Saint John, “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us.”

A couple of weeks ago I compared the power of sin to leprosy. In leprosy people go untouched. They feel unacceptable. Sin can also make us feel the same way. Not only do we need to hear that Jesus loves us. We also need to hear that others love us.

The love of God becomes real through each of us because we are filled up by the Holy Spirit. People want to know that God loves them, but they also need to know that we love them, also. That’s the way God made us and that’s the way Jesus has committed His ministry of reconciliation to us. We are to be His channels of love, flowing into the empty places of others’ hearts, that salvation may be complete for them. As we carry out that work we are “Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!”

Here’s your question: Is there someone with whom you need to be reconciled?