

New Beginnings

August 7, 2022 A.M.
West Side Church of Christ
Searcy, Arkansas
Nathan Guy

Scripture Reading

“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” (Philippians 1:6 ESV).

INTRODUCTION

It has been said the tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it.

Kim Linehan was an American Olympic swimmer who, for 8 years, held the world record in the Women’s 1500-meter freestyle. Competing at 18 years of age, Kim would do endless exercises and swam 7 to 12 miles a day. But when she was asked “what is the hardest part of your regimen?” she gave this reply: “getting in the water.”¹

Getting in the water. Beginning is tough. Starting over—beginning again—is harder still. If I couldn’t finish it the first time, why even try this time? One needs motivation to finish, and it just seem so lacking in situations like these.

But Paul writes to a struggling church from prison and shares this remarkably inspiring word: “I’m confident of this...that the same God who began a good work within you is going to carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” In his wonderful paraphrase called “The Message,” Eugene Peterson translates it this way: “There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.”

Paul says that God is doing something. He’s in there and doing something. And we say “God...is at work...in *me*?”²

¹ <https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/84419-get-into-the-water...>

² I am indebted to Billy Wilson for an inspiring sermon that served as the outline for this lesson. You can hear his sermon, “God Will Finish It” here:
<https://mattدابbs.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/billy-wilson-god-will-finish-it.mp3>

Imagine the sun was the size of an orange. The earth would be the size of a grain of sand...35 feet away. The next closest star—Proxima Centauri—would also be the size of an orange...1000 miles away. (In reality, its over 4 lightyears away). That is the distance from here to Los Angeles. To make up the Milky Way Galaxy on our model, we would need somewhere between 10 billion and 100 billion oranges, each of which are 1000 miles away from each other. That’s just one galaxy. [If you shrink our solar system to the size of a grain of sand, the Milky Way would be 31 miles wide; the next closest galaxy (Andromeda)—would be nearly 630 miles away!] Now, imagine—100 billion galaxies (that we know of!).³ And according to NASA and Hubble’s deep space imaging, that number might be 10 times too low! And Isaiah says that God holds all that he has made in the space between his thumb and his index finger.

That God! The same God whose voice shook the earth; the one who roused the dead from slumber and brought salvation from heaven—that God is at work in me. Oh, it sure doesn’t look like it. I see my failures and I know my sins. And just when I am about to give up the whole idea—that sounds so good, too good to be true—I hear his voice in my soul crying out, “Hold on! I’m not finished yet, but I’m working.”

In the days when being a sheep thief meant branding, an 18-year old Irish boy had “S T” seared into his forehead for “Sheep Thief.” Years later, in a different part of the country, a young boy saw the man working in a field and asked his daid, “what does that S T stand for?” “We don’t know, son,” his father replied, “he has never told us. But from watching his life, we all think it must stand for ‘saint.’”

God is screaming, “I’m not finished yet!” Progress takes time.

All we had were candles until the first electric light was invented—a light so dim that they couldn’t see its socket without the help of a candle.

We had nothing but rafts until the steamboat powered its way from New York City to Albany—a 150 mile trip. It only took a day and a half.

When the Wright brothers created a human-powered flying machine, it took off from Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and flew for an unbelievable...12 seconds.

³ See, for example, <https://medium.com/@clay.c.edgar/if-earth-was-a-grain-of-sand-22ea58f43d5e#:~:text=If%20the%20Earth%20was%20the,width%20of%20your%20finger%20tip>.

They never thought any mode of transportation could outdo the horse when the first car was invented—tearing up the roadways at an impressive 2-4 miles per hour, braking down often. People would pass by in their carriages and shout, “get a horse!”

And technology shouted back, “I’m not finished yet!” Progress takes time. It’s the same with me. The words I first learned as a 6 year old at camp still ring in my ears. He’s still working on me to make me what I ought to be. It took him just a week to make the moon and the stars, the sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and patient he must be...cause he’s still working on me.”

He's in you. He’s working. But he’s not content with where you were when He found you. Hear me in this: God always takes you as you are, but he never leaves you that way.

C. S. Lewis makes this point in a vivid illustration: You need a wall fixed and invite God to be your contractor. He comes in and fixes the wall—much to your delight. But then, without warning, he starts tearing down other walls, laying floor plans, and building a second story. All unexpected. None of it according to your plan. When you ask him “just what do you think you’re doing,” he replies, “I didn’t just come to visit. I plan to move in here. So I’m making a palace fit for a king.” If God’s moving in, do you expect anything less?

In the early 1940’s, *Readers Digest* ran a fictional story about a great golf legend who, while on tour visiting several countries, was asked to show off his golfing abilities in front of a particular king who always wanted to meet the golf pro. The king was impressed with the golf legend. He sent his servant to tell the avid golfer “the king would like to give you a gift—anything of your choosing.” “That’s ok,” replied the golfer, “the king’s hospitality is gift enough.” “You cannot refuse a gift from the king,” said the servant, “it’s only right to take it.” “Alright,” said the golfer, trying to think of something simple; “tell him to give me a golf club.” The next day, the servant returned and handed the golf legend the deed to a 700-acre golf club.⁴

When I first heard this story, the speaker concluded with these words: “when you’re talking about the king, you don’t think small.” So true. Everything he does commands the attention of all creation. And by his own choosing, he lives in and is at work...in you!

Paul says “I’m confident of this.” He began a good work in you, and he will see it through...to the day of completion, which is the day of Christ.

⁴ <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/exclusive-club/>

And one day it will be true—as McGuiggan once put it. We’ll be living in eternal happiness when the angels will huddle together, whispering and pointing at us. And we will shuffle over to hear what they are saying. And we will hear the angels saying to one another in awe, “doesn’t he or she look just like Christ?” We are being daily conformed to His image, and when we see him, we shall be like Him, in the day of Christ.

At 18 years of age, Augustine thought he had it all figured out. Living the way he wanted with whomever he wanted. Then one day, convicted by a sermon, Augustine walked toward his house praying to God for a sign. Little children were playing in a yard nearby singing “Tolle Lege,” which means “take up and read!” So he went home, took up his Bible, and read the book of Romans. He became a Christian and, eventually, one of the most significant and inspirational Christian writers in history.

But the story I like best about him is this one: Shortly after his conversion, Augustine was walking through town when a prostitute and former lover saw him going by. “Augustine,” she said. No reply. “Augustine.” No reply. “Augie...it’s me!” Stopping in his tracks, Augustine turned around and said, “Yes madam, but it is no longer me.”

The Spirit is at work in you. For all Christians, the same Holy Spirit of God that moved Moses and Miriam to cross the Red Sea, moved Deborah to lead and moved David to repent; the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is alive and well and at work in you.

And when it doesn’t look like it, seem like it, or feel like it, God wraps his arms around us, and whispers so tenderly to us, “Don’t give up. I’m not finished yet. Not with them. Not with you. I am your shepherd. You don’t need a thing. When you walk in the valley of the shadow of death, when you wander for years in a dry and thirsty land, when you feel alone, abandoned by neighbors or rejected by your friends—I am there. And this is not a detour; this is not a bump in the road; this is not a problem with my plan. I’m at work.” Some people will change when they see the light; others change only when they feel the heat. And my God knows me better than I know me and gives me only what he—at work in me—will allow me to bear.

I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Plans to comfort you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future. Trust me, says the Lord. I’m at work in you, and I know what I am doing.