

“Unfinished Business”

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 11/18/2018

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We humans have a natural tendency to like to “wrap things up.” To tie up loose ends, but sometimes getting to that sense of completion is a difficult thing to come by. Stuff that’s unfinished is all around us. Just when we get everything in order, something breaks loose. We may have our lives established; the children are now raised; the house is paid for, but life doesn’t hold still for long.

Something else will come up – some other challenge or opportunity or crisis will arise. Add to these surprised that come along, the unfinished business of grief from the loss of loved one, the lingering pain and resentment from a broken relationship, the sense of failure from unfulfilled plans, and the frustration from things never falling into place the way we think they should, and it is little surprise that something like putting finished touches on painting a room (or putting the last books on shelf) holds such great satisfaction.

More than a few of us were raised with the impression that life is neat and orderly; that it moves along in a very predictable pattern; that each day finds us a little further along than the previous day. Some of us even thought that by the time we reached a certain age, all the big questions would be answered, and life would take on a safe routine in which we coast along with little difficulty and few concerns.

When Jane and I watch “Midsummer Murders” on PBS, we expect conflict between the characters, but more than once I’ve said, “Inspector Barnaby better hurry up. He’s only got about 10 minutes before the end of the show.”

We know that Daniel Craig, or whoever the latest incarnation of James Bond is, will save the world.

We are fascinated with endings, but real life doesn’t always play out that way. If the clock and the calendar would take a break even for a day to give us time to gather ourselves, do a little catch-up work, that would be great. But the clock and the calendar are relentless. They march on, dragging us and our lives with them.

In today’s last verse from the Letter to the Hebrews, it says, “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, and neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

That “Day approaching” or as it’s sometimes called, “The Day of the Lord,” refers to the second coming of Jesus. God’s final wrap-up of history. It is thought of as a time when the wicked will meet with condemnation, the suffering would find comfort; those who we’ve missed in death will be restored to us; when the wealthy will share with those in need, and all the questions and problems of this life would be resolved. In other words, there would no longer be any “unfinished business” or unanswerable questions.

It sounds like a good idea. A lot of people have questions. This morning I think of the survivors of Paradise, California.

There are the days when we just get sick of the pain and the violence and hatred and illness and ill will. The only problem is this: The Day of the Lord is nowhere in sight – as far as we know.

Some of the business that’s unfinished in our lives is with people we have known. It is very common to be unhappy with our connection with people we known when they die. Either we never got the chance or we never took the opportunity to say and do things we wanted to say and do with them.

So much of the unfinished business of our lives has to do with the people we are around every

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day. There may be some relationship that isn't right, but we have put off dealing with the pain that will surface, if we deal with it.

Sometimes we are our own worst enemy. It would be nice if we could pull the covers over our heads and pretend things are different, but the only way out of it, is to go through it.

Just as individuals don't always know what to do with the unfinished business of their lives, so congregations often talk around issues and concerns without ever addressing in a deliberate and faithful way, the particular challenges facing them.

Among most churches, the unfinished business has more to do with why we are here and what kind of faith community we want to present to our community. It is that of being formed into a church that worships God with heart, mind, soul, and strength; and reaches out to neighbors far and near with love and life and peace.

But we aren't the only ones dealing with things that are unfinished. Our God, continues at the potter's wheel. Our God continues to mold the clay of our lives in divine likeness with divine purposes. God's unfinished business includes fashioning people like you and me into stewards and teacher and servants and reconcilers and comforters and friends.

Ken Follett tells the story of a cathedral being built in a city in France. Stonemasons came day after day to carve rocks. Glassblowers came day after day to make slabs of colored glass. Blacksmiths came day after day to pound iron. But more than day after day, they came year after year; yes, even, generation after generation.

You see, hundreds (thousands) of workers worked their whole lives and then died without ever seeing the cathedral completed. They knew when they were working on it, that they would never see the finished product. They built something larger than themselves and larger than their own time.

There are a lot of things in our lives that we'll never see completed – not in parenting, not in teaching, not in working with children, not in ministry not in relationships, not in building good communities, not in serving a faithful church.

There is always more to do. But we not labor alone and we do not labor in vain. Rather, we work hopefully and joyfully in the midst of many unknowns and incompletes. We do our share – we do what might seem to be more than our share – we give thanks to God for the time we have, and we keep working on whatever the unfinished business is that has fallen to us. Amen.