

Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22

Sermon Title: "A Holy Temple"

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While studying mathematics in college, much of my coursework had to do with completing proofs. Now, a mathematical proof is essentially an argument using known pieces of information to validate, and thus prove, a new statement that one is making. So most of the time, my homework would be writing proofs for given statements. Now, as in all things, there were some problems that were easy, some that were hard, but my favorite part of any proof that I had to do was what came at the end. You see, it became a generally accepted notation and one that we were expected to use that, when having finished a problem, having completed a proof, we were to draw a little box at the end of your work. This box stood as a symbol of completeness. A symbol that the statement that we set out to prove correct has been shown to be true. A symbol that your work was done.

That was my favorite part! To be able to say that the work was done. That the work was complete. And drawing that little box was even that much more satisfying when a problem was particularly hard. I have fond and no so fond memories of working on a proof for many hours spanning several days. Waking up early day after day to work on it in the stillness of the morning, hoping for an epiphany, slowly getting closer and closer to the end. Sometimes there would be setbacks, sometimes I would scrap a draft and begin again. And then, after all of that, when everything finally lined up and the statement was shown to be true, what a joy it was to draw that little box - I must truly love the simple things in life if I find joy in drawing a little box. But in that simple box drawn at the bottom of a piece of paper was a sign which showed that everything was complete.

I have always loved the feeling of completing something and I am sure that I am not alone in that feeling. There is something truly gratifying when all your hard work

brings an end result that you can just sit back, enjoy, and admire. And while you may not share my affinity for a completed math problems, I am sure you can identify the things in your life that bring you a sense of satisfaction when they are complete. For those of us who like to build or to create something with our hands, it is wonderful to see the end result of hours of toil. For those who love to garden, working the soil, planting, and then seeing the garden in its full glory – what a joy. For the cooks and bakers among us, all the effort and the care added to then be seen in a finished product that leads to happy people and full bellies – a labor of love complete. Yes, completing something that you have labored with, pouring yourself, pouring your time into the work, this can be a wonderful experience that makes us feel really, really good. And yet, there are somethings that will never be complete.

The church is one of them. Now, when I say the church, I do not mean the physical building that we occupy today which is obviously built and, for all intense and purposes, complete (accept for regular maintenance issues of course). No, when I say the church, I mean the metaphorical holy temple which Paul refers to in our scripture reading from Ephesians. As Paul talks about the growth of the Christian Community, with the expanding mission of the church to Jew and Gentile, a mission that is expanding through the differences and not being divided by them, he elaborates on this continual incompleteness of the church as community. Paul talks about this metaphorical building as one that has Jesus as the cornerstone – the key, the most important piece with a foundation of the apostles – the first members of the church and those who live, worked, ate with Jesus. And from there, every person who joins is added, bringing their unique gifts and talents – bringing their own passions for ministry, built upon this beginning, this foundation, with Christ as the cornerstone. As Paul says, “In Christ the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.” The church grows into a holy temple with every new member, with every new commitment, with every act of discipleship, with every act of love, the church

grows into a holy temple, it grows, it is not complete. For there is always room for one more member. There is always space for the offering of a new commitment. There is always room for more acts of discipleship and love to make it that much more holy.

Yes, this church's physical building here as well as many other physical church buildings may be considered complete, but the church itself is never finished being built. We witness that today, as we welcomed 10 new members into this gathering of Christ's Church. This small portion of the larger church around the world is, just like the universal church, not complete, but moving toward completeness. Today, this church continues to grow, the building up of the church continues. New gifts are brought. New passions. New ideas and new energies. We continue to build. We continue to labor toward it's completeness, knowing that we will not get there, for in the end, it is not ours to complete. But we add to it daily. We add to a holy temple that has been built upon through the ages, honoring the building up rooted in our shared and historical past, celebrating the building up that occurs in the present, and working toward the continual building, the continual growth in the future. And this goes for the universal church and for this gathering of Christ's church too. And while, like all things in life that we strive to complete, there may be setbacks and challenges, there may be easy days and hard ones, we continue labor on.

Would we love to see the church complete? Absolutely! Would we love to put that little box at the end of our history, yes, because to complete the church would mean the world has been transformed into a place where love truly was experienced and expressed by all. Where love of God and love of neighbor ruled - where everyone would know how much God loves them. Where all would be fed and no one would live in fear. A perfect world. We long for that and together we strive for that. But, while we add to the church, while we help build it up as have generations before us and as will generations to come, while our very presence adds to the holiness, and we produce glimpses of what the holy temple will look like, in the end, this is not our proof to complete. This is not our building to finish. That honor lies with Christ. But, that

doesn't mean we can't add to the proof. That doesn't mean we can lay a few more bricks, or plant a few more seeds, cook a few more meals, provide a few more little glimpses of holiness, as the building continues. For, as Christ's disciples, we are called to help build this holy temple - to help build the world and all of her people into a sacred dwelling place for God. We may not complete it, our work for as long as we walk this earth may never be done, but together, we will surely add to its glory. We will surely add to its holiness. May this be our goal, both here in this place and in the church universal, to build it up, all for the glory of God. So be it and may it be so. Amen.