

ADVENT TWO  
December 6, 2015  
Philippians 1:3-11  
*"A New Creation"*  
Pastor Saul Stensvaag

When I was at seminary, in the last century, I remember seeing a poster in a friend's dorm room which said, *"Be patient; God isn't finished with me yet."*

That can be a good motto for Christians as we live in this time between the times – the time between Christ's first coming, and his last coming at the end of time.

We are all *"works in progress"* as the saying goes. We're not yet what God intends us to be, but we are not what we were, either.

The apostle Paul knows the truth of this. That's why he says, in today's second lesson, *"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."*

The Holy Spirit **is at work** within us to make us what we were created to be: saints – joyfully serving God and neighbor.

The Bible sees this work of the Holy Spirit as part of God's new creation, which will be brought to completion at the end of time, when Christ returns.

That's why Charles Wesley, the writer of today's hymn of the day, begins his fourth verse this way:  
*"Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be."*

Now, to be honest, we can't always see signs that God is at work to bring about this new creation.

In fact, sometimes all of the evidence would indicate that things are getting worse, not better. It's easy to lose heart.

But the apostle Paul is certain when he writes, *"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion...."* GOD WILL NOT FAIL.

Isaiah 55 reminds us that God's word has power to produce results even when we can't see it:

*"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, ... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

God **will finish** his new creation.

The Holy Spirit – which begins a new work in each of us when we are baptized – will surely bring that work to completion before the day of Jesus Christ.

I recently met with a friend who's been a youth worker at a large congregation for almost 30 years. Like me, she displays in her office the pictures of every confirmation class since her first year in youth ministry.

When Kathy first started there, the youth ministry had fallen on hard times. The only youth attending were a half a dozen boys who were nothing but trouble.

In fact, the staff, behind closed doors, of course referred to them as **"the boys from hell."** Believe it or not, I've had a few boys... and girls like that over the years. Yes, even here at First Lutheran!

Anyway, Kathy's "Boys from Hell" were rude and behaved badly, making life miserable for her for many months. But **she never gave up on them.** She continued to try to share the love of Christ with them, and help them grow in their Christian faith. And they kept coming!

One of those boys is attending worship at that church now, bringing his own young sons. And he recently said to Kathy, *"Thank you for not kicking us out of youth group back then. We deserved to be kicked out. We were real jerks. But we had no place else to go. I'm so glad you didn't give up on us."*

Who knows? Maybe Kathy somehow knew that the Holy Spirit was at work in the hearts of those young men, working to finish Christ's new creation – shaping them to live their lives like children of God.

This is a message of hope and grace for all of us.

**We may not be the boys or girls from Hell, but there are times when we sure act like it. We all have our own sins and shortcomings.**

Still, **we can be patient – with ourselves and with one another –** because we know that **God hasn't finished with us yet.**

**The Holy Spirit is still at work,** behind the scenes, to **finish God's new creation** in us.

One of the **primary means** by which the Holy Spirit works in us is through the **word and sacrament ministry of the Christian Church.**

That's why worship is so important.

In worship we hear the powerful word of God – that word which does not return to God empty but always accomplishes God's purpose in our lives.

In worship we receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

And, as we learned in Luther's small catechism, this simple meal packs **all of the power of God's eternal promise of forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation.**

When we receive Christ's body and blood, he picks us up and makes us new again, so we can have a fresh start.

That means, every time we receive Communion, we **experience – even if only partially – the new creation** promised in the Bible.

And we can be confident, with the apostle Paul, that the one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion. **God will, indeed, finish the new creation** some day.

In the meantime, we will continue to know struggles and setbacks. But we don't need to lose hope. Because the **final result is certain**.

GOD WILL PREVAIL.

The book Free to Be states it so well:

*"You are not yet what God made you to be. There are two yous: an old you that struggles and fights, worries, and wonders, because it's going to die, and a new you born in the water and the word of Baptism. These two yous fight within each of us, and they will keep on struggling until the old you, the old Adam or Eve, finally dies forever – when we die.*

*Meanwhile, you know that the Holy Spirit is at work right now, in and through the church, speaking the word of forgiveness and the promise of the resurrection to you.*

*And **someday, when the last day comes**, there will NO LONGER BE TWO YOUS BUT ONE: THE NEW YOU CHRIST HAS MADE."*

My friends, remember: God will indeed **complete the good work begun in you at baptism**.

If the Holy Spirit could TRANSFORM THE "BOYS FROM HELL," there is **surely hope for you and me**. Amen.