



By Rev Mark Derry, Church of the Epiphany



God knows that I have a lot of books on my shelf. I love books. Even the ones I bought that I still haven't read (after many years) as I find a comfort in knowing that, well, they're there if I ever need them. One purchase caught my eye a while ago, it was entitled *The Imperfect Pastor*, as Zack Erswine details how we often enter into pastoral ministry with all good intentions, but then the world's standards take over as a "measurement" of our ministry.

Many, I'm sure, can identify as, like me, you probably aspired to make a difference in people's lives (excellent) but allowed the standards of the world to displace and discourage that original enthusiasm (not so excellent).

Two areas I found helpful were the following premises that Erswine raised. Firstly, instead of viewing ministry, both lay and ordained, as a chance to obviously do great things, the encouragement was to recognise it as a slow work. The term that captured my imagination was to view myself as a "long-distance grace runner" able to be patient in my particular context.

And, secondly, instead of trying to be everywhere, fix everything, know everything, and do it all quickly, but rather, and I am paraphrasing the argument, to re-learn what it looks like to behold God.

At the end of Colossians (4:17), an almost obscure appendage, is Paul's exhortation to Archippus, also mentioned in Philemon, to "complete the ministry". This, of course, led me down the rabbit hole, when the Master returns (Mark 13:34ff) what will he find?

It's a challenging thought, because when I take the "I" out of my reflection, it's much easier to see the tapestry that God is weaving around my life and others. I normally see what God is doing, if I abide in him, but sometimes I don't. I live in many overlapping stories, most of which are larger than me. Each of us, I know, will die with unfinished stories. Like those who wept by the waters of Babylon (137:1), we may never get to see every dream, hope or answer fulfilled on this side of eternity. Yet, I am reminded that God is God. Ultimately, it is His story and not ours. In the end God sent Messiah Jesus to the temple. The glory of the new Temple was greater than Solomon's. The Jewish poet who wept by the rivers never saw the end of the story. Like the other heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11), he lived with the story unfinished in his lifetime.

The realisation is that some stories won't be tied up until heaven. But, as we await Jesus's return, it draws us into the heart of the Godhead, which is why I was drawn into God's embrace in the first place.

So, if it's weighing you down. Either the perceived "unfinished work", that which you feel guilty about, or procrastinating about (again), or your Achilles's heel of task-achievement, both of which I am guilty – perhaps you need to pause. Lift up your gaze. And may God open our eyes to see our unfinished work in the light of his sufficiency and divine love. We are designed to operate from our rest and security in Him!

As Paul declares, we are raised with Messiah Jesus and seated with Him in Heavenly places (Eph 2:6). The imagery is one of rest and repose. Know these gap moments are a space for grace, remembering that you are not the sole "jigsaw piece" in the tapestry the Almighty is weaving. What really pleases God is the yes of your heart and your attitude towards Him.

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Which reminds me of this heart cry from table of our Lord, as articulated in a Celtic invitation: So, come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more; You who have been to this sacrament often, and you who have not been for a long time; You who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed. Come. It is Christ Jesus himself who invites us to meet him here now. (Even if unfinished business makes you soul weary.)

I CANNOT DO THIS ALONE



I love this beautiful prayer by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (commemorated on 9th April):

I Cannot Do This Alone
O God, early in the morning I cry to you.
Help me to pray
And to concentrate my thoughts on you;
I cannot do this alone.
In me there is darkness,
But with you there is light;
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;
I am restless, but with you there is peace.
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;
I do not understand your ways,
But you know the way for me....
Restore me to liberty,
And enable me to live now
That I may answer before you and before men.
Lord whatever this day may bring,
Your name be praised.
Amen

The Tapestry



Corrie Ten Boom: Reflections of God's Glory

As Corrie spoke, she slowly unfolded the purple cloth in her hands and revealed hundreds of strings tied in knots and pulled through the cloth. It all looked so random. She showed the children how the strings didn't seem to make sense from where they sat at her feet on the floor in the living room.

"That's the whole point," she exclaimed. She said it was because of our limited vision, our limited perspective of what God is doing in our lives, that we question Him.

At that point Corrie slowly turned the purple tangled mess around to reveal a beautiful tapestry: a crown of gold with multicolored jewels.

"This" she said, "is what God sees....from His perspective....a masterpiece!"

