

Stained Glass Stories – Hands
Isaiah 49:14-16
Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost
August 25, 2019
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Isaiah 49:14-16 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁴ But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,
my Lord has forgotten me.”

¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.

¹⁶ See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are continually before me.

I’ve always thought it odd, a disservice, that women’s clothes don’t have pockets. I like to have my Chapstick with me when we walk. I borrow Gene’s. Modi likes her treats. Gene is carrying them. Wipe my nose? Don’t even ask!

When our first grandchild was born, I do remember thinking, “Now, I need to be like my grandmas...always a tissue or a treat in my pocket.”
Know what I’m talking about?

Pockets.

A place to carry a little cash to the farmer’s market “just in case.”

A place to stick our hands on a chilly morning walk.

A place, for goodness sakes, for a tissue.

Pockets.

It’s where I’ve found a surprise mint or cough drop. Love that!

Or, maybe, just maybe, a love note.

Now that school has started, do you parents remember sticking a note in your kids’ lunches?

I know our daughter, now in her 30th year of teaching 2nd graders, has to get creative sometimes to make sure kids take messages home. Stick it in their sock or if all else fails – use a magic marker to write a reminder on the back of their hands.

Sometimes, IF WE HAVE TO DO DRASTIC THINGS TO REMEMBER.

Especially when we fall into the very human frustration of thinking that GOD has forgotten...

...forgotten what we've prayed for? It's been hours, God! What's the answer?
...forgotten us? I'm still hurting – physically, emotionally, financially, spiritually.
What's the delay, God?

In today's *short* reading from the OT prophet Isaiah, God's people were asking, "Has the Lord *...forgotten me.*"

When we study scripture and say our prayers we affirm for ourselves and each other that God never forgets.

Sometimes, though, it might seem that God has...

And God **gets** that and understands our weak moments, and oh how we must frustrate God!

So, like a 2nd grade teacher, who doesn't want her student to forget, God issues this promise:

(Verse 15 again.)

"Can a woman forget...and show no compassion for the child of her womb?"

Maybe. Dementia or an accident; SHE may forget, God says, but "I will not forget you."

Today's Stained Glass Stories windows, from where our Sunday school lesson come, are again, out of direct sight. I've put pictures of the two windows on the bulletin front that are in the prayer chapel.

These windows, with very prominent depictions of hands, were dedicated after 1963 when the vestibule/entry was turned into the chapel. Our saintly Rev. Glenn, I'm told through Gretchen, used to share that he loved the two "hand-windows."

Rev. Glenn said the window with two hands reminded him that one hand was God and the lesser hand was his own; that he was being led by his Master.

God says, "I will not forget you."

I'm guessing God doesn't need a Sharpie marker!

"See," God says, "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands!"

I pray you're hearing the significance of those words today.

That the God of creation,
of supreme workmanship,
of tender care and loving support,
has US engraved on the palm of His hands!

God's word says, in Isaiah 48:13:

"My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together."

Yep, THOSE hands.

God's power and plan and purpose...God's care is from the teeniest atom particle to the immensities that the Hubbel telescope can reach.

"See," God says, "I've engraved you on the palms of my hands."

God rested on the Sabbath, we know, it says so in Genesis, but God's work doesn't cease.

We depend on God to maintain the cycles of life.

In water.

In the seasons.

In life itself.

God's holding it together ON OUR BEHALF!

"See," God says, "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

When I was beginning the treatment I needed for my breast cancer, the technicians said, "Okay, we're going to give you a tattoo to make the coordinates for the radiation machine."

I balked! I had a vague recall of "somewhere" in the Bible that there was a "rule" about "NO TATTOOS."

I was thinking some garish mark was going to be put on me. Turns out they are three, smaller-than-a-pencil-point marks.

As I remembered that, I more emphatically recall that we better know what we're reading in here [Bible] and the lesson behind the verses.

I'm not cheerleading for tattoos; frankly I don't "get" 'em...

The verse in the Bible that is often referred to about tattoos is Leviticus 19:28, which says, "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor **tattoo** any marks on you: I am the Lord."

God's Word in this verse (and the ones surrounding it) was for God's people to have obedience to God, not to the pagan rituals of the peoples they were living among. "Scarification" if you will, brought focus to pagan rituals that aren't needed by God's people.

If Denise had read today's verses from the KJV we'd have heard that God has "graven (inscribed) thee upon the palms of my hands..."

The translations is, yep, "tattooed" you on my hand!

Here "graven" doesn't mean a carved idol, but to write or to print....like God wants God's Word written on our hearts.

But, why does God have us tattooed on His hands?

I think so that He can see them often. Every day.

I envision God looking at these reminders like we look at pictures of our loved ones. We used to carry pictures in our wallets, maybe some of you still do, in those little plastic "pages." Now, we've got pictures on our phones! Either way they're reminders of people we love and they make us feel good when we look at them.

Or like my Grandma Lela's Bible. It sat on her bedside table. Inside she'd written each of her kids' names....and their spouses...and their kids...and our kids... She'd open that Bible at the beginning of each day to read God's Word and see our names. She'd end the day the same way. Every time she opened the cover, there we were...and she remembered us, each of us every time.

I recalled her Bible, when I read today's verses as a reminder of the ways WE are remembered by Someone who loves us very much.

“See,” God says, “I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”

We are created by a glorious God.
That glorious God continues to work, in cycles and seasons.
And God's hands are apparent in God's loving care of us.
Like the potter, in the book of Jeremiah, reshapes the clay, God continues that loving care with re-routing and re-organizing and re-storing us.

Over and over again, the scriptures describe the ministry of God's care:

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Is. 41:10)

“See,” God says, “I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”

And when we need the foundations of our faith strengthened...
When we ask HOW has God engraved us on His hands?
When we ask for proof of God's love and care and that God really does remember us, we get marched right into the NT.

Remember, with me, how after Jesus was resurrected, he came into the upper room where all the disciples, including Thomas, were.

John's gospel records (Jn. 21:26-28):

“A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and

said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Luke's gospel continues the story: Jesus said to them (Luke 24:38-40)

"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

And the evidence of God's abundant, abiding, thorough and constant care is still there...in Jesus hands, marked with nails...those marks will never go away.

"See," God says, "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

As I've watched our kids have their kids (and yes, I have them written on MY prayer list) I like to observe. When the Grandies were young, they reached up their little hands to take a grip of their mommy or daddy. It's been a while, but I'll admit, I can recall wondering: were they reaching out for comfort or reassurance? And I had opposing emotions: one of tenderness and another that bordering on embarrassment for watching.

Dear Ones, don't ever be embarrassed to reach out for God's Hand for comfort or reassurance. That Hand bears your name!

Rev. Glenn used our stained glass windows in the chapel now named for him, to remind him of God's calling on his life. Be sure to get in there. You should probably check YOUR pocket to be sure you've got a tissue. Get in there and observe what Glenn may have been seeing – that WE ARE written on God's hands.

Amen!