



## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Seventh Sunday of Easter**

**May 13, 2018**

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### **“An Unforgettable Reminder”**

*(Isaiah 49:15-16a)*

Rev. David K. Groth

Mother’s Day, 2018

*“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born? Though she may forget, I will never forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands” (Isaiah 49:15-16a).*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect:** O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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So it's your turn to pick up treats for the office, and you need to do it first thing in the morning. The night before, do you trust you'll remember it the next morning, or do you put out a reminder? Do you put a sticky note on the counter? Do you write it into your cell phone, or some other calendar? For \$32 on Amazon you can buy a dry erase elephant, and write it on that because an elephant never forgets. Some people put on silicon rings as a reminder to do something. Personally, I put a piece of paper in the French Press, because though I may forget to look at the calendar, I *will* not forget to make coffee.

What do you use as a reminder? In many cases, the stakes are much higher. Last week in the Wall Street Journal there was an article about a new movement recently launched in America. It's entitled "Bag in the Back," and it urges parents to put some essential item in the back seat of the car next to the infant in the car seat. So, for example, put your cell phone back there, or your wallet, or purse, or even one of your shoes, so that you won't forget there's a sleeping infant in back. It can happen to anyone and it happens too often (WSJ, May 3, 2018).

What do you use as a reminder to do something important? In our text, we'll see how far the Lord is willing to go down this path in order to remember us and not forget us.

This text is from the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah, God is warning his people that their sin would bring disaster on them, and it will come in the form of the Babylonian army ransacking their towns and cities. Even Jerusalem would be sacked, the temple leveled, and the leaders of society taken into captivity. Imagine, all your life you grew up knowing you were part of God's chosen people. All your life you

were reminded God will never abandon his covenant with you. All your life you heard of his mighty miracles; for instance, how the armies of Israel had only to be still while the Lord himself fought their battles. Imagine now seeing your nation, your neighborhood overrun by a treacherous enemy. It would be a national tragedy, but it would also stir up a theological crisis. How can this be happening to God's chosen people? If God is almighty and on our side, then why is he simply watching us fall? Is he finally fed up with us? Has he washed his hands of us and abandoned his covenant with us? That's precisely the conclusion the people have made. Verse 14: "Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.'"

You know, it can happen to you and me too. All our lives, we've been told God will never leave us or forsake us. All our lives, we've heard of Jesus' love, and his miracles. But then, when things begin to unravel and it doesn't feel like he loves us and there are no miracles, well then, we begin to wonder!

Last week, a UW-Oshkosh Business Professor gave his last lecture. Some time before he had noticed he was having frequent cases of the hiccups. At first he didn't think about it much, but after it persisted, he made an appointment with his primary care physician. And you can imagine the initial thoughts of the doctor: maybe it had something to do with carbonated beverages or meal portions, or acid reflux. He ordered a routine test. But you know how it goes. One test leads to another, and then another, flags keep rising, and the news keeps getting progressively worse. This professor is now in hospice care. I don't know his thoughts, but it would be easy for anyone to conclude God is not real, or if he is real, he is not good, or for some reason does not care, might even be angry. Bad news can lead to a theological crisis for any one of us, and then *we* begin to sound *just* like God's ancient people 2700 years ago, "The Lord has forsaken me; my God has forgotten me."

So how does God deal with our despondency, our sense of forsakenness? He responds with one of the most

poignant questions in all Scripture. “Can a woman forget the baby at her breast, or show no compassion for the child she has born?”

God knows that a mother’s love can be fierce and indestructible. A mother’s love is often the closest thing we know to unconditional love on this earth. You can come home from college with snakes tattooed on your face, and your mother will still see the good in you, will still love you. She knows when you’re in trouble. (And kids, you will get into deep trouble some day. Count on it.) But your mother will still love you. And if she must, like an old lioness, she’ll come running, even if you’re 2,000 miles away.

The Lord knows this about mothers, but in effect says, “This is nothing compared to my love for you. This is child’s play compared to my love.” “Though she may forget, I will never forget you.” In effect, God is saying, “You give me nothing. It’s nothing but take, take, take, take. You are completely selfish. You add no value to my life, but nonetheless I will love you unconditionally as a matter of will. I will never forget you. I will always remember you.”

Then a new thought: “Behold, I have engraved you in the palms of my hands.”

In the ancient world, slaves were owned lock, stock and barrel. They were worked hard, abused. They had no rights, no legal recourse. They were living possessions. And it was sometimes true in the ancient world that a master would even have his name tattooed on his servant or slave. The message was, “This slave belongs to me. He will always belong to me.” But never, NEVER was the master tattooed with the servant’s name. That would be ridiculous! That would mean a master who’s devoted to his servant.

Guess what, that is precisely what we have going on in our text. We have a master devoted to his servants. Isn’t that beautiful? We have a master serving and the servants receiving. It’s another metaphor for God’s love. But the Lord isn’t finished, because it doesn’t say tattooed. This is no pin prick. It says, “I have engraved you on the palm of my hands.” Picture your name being chiseled into the palm

of the Lord's hands. The metaphor has just become much stronger.

But still, it's only a metaphor; we need something more. After all, these are just words. When you're in deep trouble, you need more than just words. You'll never believe a person really loves you unless you have action. In the end, what really convinces you that someone loves you is not talk, but evidence of the sacrificial kind.

"I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." Some translations use the word "inscribed" here, or even "written;" I have written you onto the palms of my hands." But neither of those is nearly strong enough. That word engrave is a very specific Hebrew word which means cutting into something with a hammer and chisel. It's the same word used to convey the act of cutting a tomb out of a hillside (Is. 22:16)! "I have engraved you". . . "I have cut you in to the palms of my hands."

In your mind, conjure up the image of someone out of love letting people take a hammer and drive a spike right into their hands. It's called crucifixion and of all the ways to execute a man, this is the most cruel that the Romans could think of. Use some spikes to fasten a guy to a couple of beams of wood, and let him hang there until dead.

Centuries later there was a man named Thomas who didn't believe, refused to believe unless he could see the signs, the evidence. Words weren't enough for Thomas. He needed more. "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails . . . I will never believe." Jesus appears to him and says, "Put your finger here and see my hands." "Contemplate, Thomas, the evidence of my love." God's love for us is far more than talk, far more than a metaphor. It's a deed, an action, a willingness to make incredible sacrifices.

Moms and dads, what sacrifices are you willing to make for your children? Are you willing to die for your children? Of course you are! I know you wouldn't hesitate. Are you also willing to bring them to God's house week in and week out so that they know of God's love and sacrifices

for them, and so that they will remember and believe and not forget? After all, if you take the Bible seriously there's a lot on the line.

One day your kids are going to be in the position where it feels like everything is unraveling, when they receive one piece of bad news after another. Maybe the news will come from a sequence of doctors. Maybe it will come from their employer in the middle of a deep recession. Maybe it will come from a spouse that no longer loves them but is beloved by another, or even something much worse. Don't you want your kids on that day to have some hope to cling to, some promise to hold on to, some strength to count on? Don't you want them to have something more to lean on than empty platitudes? Don't you want them to have the sure promises of their Creator and Redeemer, and evidence in his hands to back up those promises? What sacrifices are you willing to make so that your children have that assurance? You said you are willing to die for them. Are you even willing to bring them up in the nurture and instruction and admonition of the Lord? (Eph. 6:4). Your children will likely object to the new leaf. Tell them, "See God about it" . . . because you're only doing what God has commanded all parents to do.

One last thing: This passage speaks of God's unconditional love for you, which is far stronger love than any mother can give her children. What if you say, "God can't love me because look at all the awful stuff I've done. Look at all the people I've hurt, all the times I've disregarded the commands of God and followed the desires of my heart. God can't love me. Look at all the times I've indulged myself by raging at others, or by being stubborn and obstinate. You know what Jesus says? "Are you afraid that God's going to forsake you? On the cross I was forsaken." "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "I was forsaken. I got the forsakenness you sense you deserve, so that no matter what you've done, God will never forsake you."

God loves you more than a mother could ever love

her nursing infant. He doesn't need a sticky note to remind himself to forgive you in the morning. He doesn't need a dry erase elephant to remember to protect and keep you. He doesn't need to wear a silicon ring or put a piece of paper in the French Press so that he doesn't forget to save you on the Last Day. One glance at those hands of his which still bear the marks, the evidence, one glance and he remembers. He will never, ever forget you.

It's hard to imagine anything more tenacious, more fiercely devoted than the love of a mother for her child. But, there is one thing: the love of God for you in Jesus Christ.

*“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born? Though she may forget, I will never forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.” Amen.*

