

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 425, 05-09-2021 †† Easter 6

“Lord God, you have appointed me as Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

ISAIAH 49

¹³ Shout for joy, O heavens,
and rejoice, O earth.

Let mountains burst forth with shouts of joy,
because the LORD is comforting His people,
and he is showing mercy to His afflicted ones.

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

¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child
and not show mercy to the son from her womb?
Even if these women could forget,
I will never forget you.

¹⁶ Look, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.
Your walls are never out of my sight.

¹⁷ Your children are hurrying back.
Those who destroyed and devastated you will depart from you.

¹⁸ Lift up your eyes all around and see!
All of them are gathered. They are coming to you.
As surely as I live, declares the LORD,
all of them are like jewelry that you will put on.
You will wear them like a bride.





Grandma Bode's hands are 91 years old in this picture. She raised 7 children with those hands. She sewed countless clothes and quilted over 300 quilts with those hands. She received one wedding ring with those hands, and Grandpa Bode survived her less than a year. She fed us chicken noodle soup with those hands and baked fabled dinner rolls and tasty pies with those hands. She hugged us with those hands, and at college she wrote adoring letters to us with those hands. Those were special hands.

Picture your mom's hands, your grandma's hands, your wife's hands, the hands of your mother-figure. Think about all the memories that go with those hands, all the help and hard work. She remembers things that she'll never be able to describe, even to you. That connection is permanent. She is unforgettably Mom.

How much more the hands that endure from generation to generation! The hands of God include memories that cannot be deleted. They are permanent, because no one ever lived long enough to remember what God remembers.

God Has You Memorized

1. Mothers don't remember as well as God

Isaiah speaks of Zion as God's own people who will return from exile. He says, "*Shout for joy, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth. Let mountains burst forth with shouts of joy*" (13). Loud noises in nature should be inspired by the coming return from exile. It is a crescendo, as each Hebrew verb is arranged in climactic order. Isaiah often tells rocks, hills, and trees to clap, shout, and sing. He wants them to praise God for saving His people.

Does Isaiah not get it? Does he think, as Aristotle did, that there is some spirit in each rock, tree, and hill that can respond? Does Isaiah not understand science? Of course he does. But in calling on creation to praise God, Isaiah understands the purpose of God's creation better than many philosophers and scientists. There is nothing greater than that we receive life and salvation from God as a gift. Let all nature and created things joyfully praise this God!

Then Zion breaks the harmony. Zion, God's own people, are not so excited. "*The Lord has left me and forgotten me*" (14). God's children lament for their situation. Zion speaks according to the judgment of their flesh. The elect complain when they are afflicted.

You and I as New Testament believers are part of Zion. We are afflicted with ills and trials on this sinful soil. We are tempted to challenge God, and pose the question: Did you forget me? Did you forget me in my illness? Did you forget me in my loss? Did you forget me along with the popular crowd? Did you leave me along with all my friends? Did you leave me with my family? Did you leave me with my good health?

Yet the Lord has an answer for Zion. He says, "*Can a woman forget her nursing child and not show mercy to the son from her womb? Even if these women could forget, I will never forget you*" (15).

A woman and mother's emotions can rise 1,000 times higher than other feelings. The love of a mother's heart cannot forget its child. This is unnatural. A mom's job is full-time, and a mother would go through fire for her children. Yet you cannot name a woman to God, even the most tenderhearted, who is more tenderhearted than our God.

Here you see the Holy Spirit answering our emotions:

- The heart says, "I am forsaken." The Spirit says, "I have mercy on you."
- The heart says, "You left me." The Spirit says, "I am here. I never left. In fact, you can never hide from me" (Psa. 139).
- The heart says, "You forgot me." The Spirit says, "How could I forget the new creation I formed within you?"
- The heart says, "I am a weak sinner." The Spirit says, "You are righteous and a child of the Omnipotent God."

In that wrestling match, we are put to the test, we are exercised, and we are consoled by a motherly kind of love.

2. God's hands are His reminders

Zion speaks according to the judgment of their flesh, but instead Zion should judge based on God's Word. So the Lord appeals to what He has laid down in writing in Scripture. "*Look, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands*" (16). What is written was preserved through the ages. It is unforgettable.

Yet God's love is literally inscribed forever in His hands. The wounds were chiseled in His hands for you. The pain of sin was punctured on His palms. God's love received those wounds as they were seared into His memory—an unforgettable, painful memory. Imagine Jesus looking down at the marks on His hands and forgetting what those were for—Never! It is impossible for Him to forget why those scars are there.

Humans need a checklist. We need reminders. We need ways to not forget things to do. God does not. Not when it comes to His children. We are not on His to-do list. We are on his list of life accomplishments: "I made you personally and rescued you from darkness. It's a highlight of my life. It hurt deep into my own hands." I call this God's "indelible forgetfulness," a permanent mark that makes God incapable of forgetfulness.

So God uses His hands as walls. His guarding hands wall us up in His personal protection. Typically, walls surround a city. There are always walls around us, though invisible and the objects of faith.

Throughout the Bible, God offers walls of salvation, of water, and of fire. *“We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts”* (Isa 26:1). *“Run, tell that young man, ‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will be its glory within’”* (Zech 2:4-5).

God’s enemies think they are protected by walls, as if we are defenseless. But our walls are transcendent, immovable walls. Our walls are the hands of God.

Grandma’s hands in this picture also make me sad. The first thing that gets me are her knuckles. They are swollen and crooked with arthritis. Sin took its toll. By age 91, Grandma Bode was forgetting things. She sometimes forgot that I was my Dad’s son, not a different relative. She sometimes forgot what she ate that day or how to eat. She forgot why she was in this strange new assisted living place. Sin took its toll on her, and she forgot. But I am comforted to know ... Never once did God forget her. Never once did God withdraw His saving arm from her. Never once did the marks on His hands lose their powerful reminder that she belongs to Him. He had her memorized even when her memory failed. Never once did God forget any of His own, including you. When you would like to forget all our sins and all that sin has done to you, God has you eternally memorized; in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.