

“I Will Not Forget You!”

✱ **Engraved in compassion** (vv.13-16)

✱ **Ornaments of God** (vv.17-18)

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Light, dear fellow servants of the LORD:

It used to be cool in Middle School for kids to say to each other, “Forget you!” That meant, “You said something I don’t like, so ‘Forget you!’” No one ever did as far as I remember. Forgetting someone was hard when you saw them every day. But long after all those friends have come and gone, it’s easy to feel left behind, forgotten by everyone. Worst of all, we sometimes feel as if God has forgotten us. If your prayers don’t seem to be getting through and some deep grief has been hanging on your heart, if relief seems far away each day, how do you know God cares?

Take all the nasty, careless things adults and children say, and turn them around. Then you have God’s Word of grace for us this day: **“I Will Not Forget You!”** And lest anyone think this is a throwaway line like, “Take care,” or “Be well,” our gracious God will detail how we are eternally **Engraved in compassion**, bright, beautiful, precious **Ornaments of God**.

✱ **Engraved in compassion** (vv.13-16)

Jesus had a job to do. His earthly ministry began at His Baptism in the Jordan River by His cousin John. It must be very important to know that God will not **Forget You**. The heavenly Father was very intent on making sure His one and only begotten Son did not feel alone and forgotten on this sin-cursed earth. God sent the Holy Spirit swooping down like a dove on Jesus, then proclaimed in *a voice from heaven*, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** (Matthew 3:17 NIV)

In the coming weeks of Lent, we will see why Jesus needed to hear those words. We need them too as we behold His bloody crucifixion as the worst of criminals. It’s all coming for you and me during the 40 days when we follow our Savior in His Passion leading up to Easter’s glorious celebration. But this was not the beginning of Jesus’ work as our Savior. Before time began, from all eternity, the Triune God deliberated among the Three Persons of the Godhead. The First Person said to the Second: **“You are my Son; today I have become your Father.”** (Psalm 2:7 NIV)

With that declaration the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, gave more details through the prophets until 700 B.C., when He inspired Isaiah to sing four Servant Songs about the coming Messiah. Our text picks up at the very end of the 2nd Servant Song (Isaiah 49:1-13). And God who so loved the world that He gave His one and only begotten Son as our Savior, tells the entire world what to do with this great Good News: **“Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.”** According to the Lord’s Apostle Paul in Romans, creation, what we call “nature,” has been standing on tiptoe like a child waiting for a parade to see God’s comfort and compassion for all who suffer under the cross of Christ.

Sometimes we just can’t see or feel it. Don’t you find that the worst times often come in the crash of emotions after the good times? So you had a great weekend, but then comes Monday when everyone at work or school is tired and cranky. So you had a great getaway with your family, but then the pile of mail back home nearly suffocates you. Find one bill you should have paid a few days ago, and *Bammo!* You’re over the edge. Married couples feel it too after their most warm and wonderful moments together. A few misplaced, careless comments, and broken hearts are asking, “Did you forget about me? About us?” John Denver’s old country classic, “Leavin’ on a Jet Plane,” wondered, “Why do we always fight when I have to go?” And *Zion said*, **“The LORD has forsaken me, the LORD has forgotten me.”**

We have certainly forgotten God, times without number. Who of us doesn't have to admit our hearts are captured more quickly by movies than worship? We may remember to pray for ourselves, but how often do you pray earnestly for your neighbor, your congregation and pastor, for the missionaries, teachers and administrators of our synod? Our society is enraged with forgetful terms like "products of conception" or "fetus" to hide the responsibility of offspring. Ancient pagans sacrificed their children to Molech, Americans to idols of convenience. So God asks a fitting question: ***"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me."***

Take an engraver sometime and see how long you can stand that vibrating tip pressed hard into the flesh of your hand. It would make a bloody mess to engrave someone's name there. And it made a bloody mess when God engraved our names with two Roman nails and a sledge hammer through the palms of Jesus' quivering hands. He still has the nail marks to prove God's unforgettable love for you and me. He holds them up as trophies for all to see how deeply, how passionately, how endlessly God cares. There's only one thing God says He absolutely will forget about us forever: our sin. By His death and resurrection, God's Suffering Servant Jesus Christ, the Jewish, *Jeshua Moshiach*, tore down the wall of sin that separated us from God. Now He is building us up as the walls of His eternal city, the New Jerusalem, the spiritual temple of living stones where your soul is absolutely precious in God's good plan. **"I Will Not Forget You!"** You are **Engraved in compassion** on my own two hands. You are...

*** Ornaments of God (vv.17-18)**

Is it true that parents live through their children? Yes, and it's not a pretty sight to see some of the basketball and hockey dads these days living obnoxiously in the grandstands while they embarrass friends and family along with their kids. Some still don't get it when the refs throw them out of the game. There has to be a sense of balance in this. Besides, such living is more like leaches, not so much for the sake of the children as for some empty spot in a parent's heart which you just can't fill with self.

God's love for children flies high above all this selfishness in our hearts and homes. It soars on the wings of the wind to the hopes and dreams of every heart that only God can fill. He who loved us first, teaches us to love one another, and especially the children God has given us, whether biologically, or spiritually in a Christian congregation like ours. God dearly loves His children.

The unselfish, self-sacrificing love of God cries out: ***"Your sons hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you. Lift up your eyes and look around; all your sons gather and come to you."*** God had warned the Israelites through His prophets all the way back to Moses, that if they attempted fertile prosperity through false gods like Baal, their children would be lost, their fields and cities destroyed. Through Isaiah and His contemporaries, the LORD was still trying to spare His people the wasteful destruction that was only a century away. God held out the hope of deliverance for all who would turn from their evil ways and worship their Creator and His Son, their all-redeeming Savior.

God still has such heartfelt love for us. After all these centuries He has not forgotten His mercy, His exceeding great and precious promises of eternal life at home with Him in heaven. ***As surely as I live," declares the Lord, "you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride."*** That's your children, so precious to God that His worn and weary Son rebuked His own disciples, took the children up in His arms and blessed them. He tells all His disciples to receive the kingdom of God as easily as a child held close in your arms. ***"Like a bride"*** putting on her jewelry in eager anticipation of the best day of her life, so we raise up our children as **Ornaments of God's** grace in Christ.

And that's the blessing God gives in our Baptism. Baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, you are to God like the finest gold pendant, glistening on His neck in beautiful pearls from the deeds of Christ that reflect in your love for your family and the children God has entrusted to your care. In sunshine and shadow, **"I Will Not Forget You!"** says the LORD. Let us remember Him. Amen.