

**¹³ Sing for joy, O heavens!
Rejoice, O earth!
Burst into song, O mountains!
For the LORD has comforted his people
and will have compassion on them in their suffering.
¹⁴ Yet Jerusalem says, "The LORD has deserted us;
the Lord has forgotten us."
¹⁵ "Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child?
Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?
But even if that were possible,
I would not forget you!
¹⁶ See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.
Isaiah 49:13-16a**

Greetings my friends!

Simply to give you a little context; the above Scripture is written in a time and a place when the people of Israel were taken into captivity in a far away land. Most scholars believe that this passage was penned to paper after the Israelites have been in captivity for nearly 200 years. The author of this passage is sharing what it will be like when God acts to free the Israelites from the captivity just before this passage begins. Verse 13 is the climax of this section of Scripture and verse 14 shares the thoughts of the people of Israel to the prophet's words.

Certain passages of Holy Scripture have taken on much greater meaning to my life personally since the beginning of the pandemic. The psalms which were written for God's children to provide guidance in daily living during times of both plenty and times of want to have certainly sustained me through this pandemic. Now, in the season of Advent, I have been taking great comfort in the words of Isaiah.

For you see, Isaiah is writing to a people trying to inspire hope and faithfulness that God has spoken "Freedom" to the people of Israel, yet the "Freedom" that has been spoken of has not yet been fully revealed in the world around them. Nonetheless, because God has spoken "freedom" truly "freedom" is certain to come.

The people are living in the "in between time." The "in between time" of a sure and certain promise of God being made and that time when it will be fully realized!

We all live in this "in between time" as Christians! In the waters of baptism our God has declared that indeed we are children of the living God and will inherit the eternal kingdom alongside our Lord. And while this promise is sure and certain, this divine reality is not realized at this moment in time.

The global pandemic of 2020 has brought this feeling into a microscopic focus. It has been 10 months since the pandemic restrictions starting to be enacted. The wearing of facemasks, the washing of hands, the sanitizing everything in sight, the social distancing, and the "no hug" policy have greatly impacted the way we live. For our sisters and brothers living in care communities, the restrictions are even greater. For these sisters and brothers dining has been adjusted, visitation of family and friends has been restricted and many other social contacts which we once may have taken for granted have been momentarily taken away.

Yet my sisters and brothers, we have not been forgotten!

We have not been forgotten by our God! We have not been forgotten by our community of faith!
We have not been forgotten by our family and friends!

*Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child?
Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?
But even if that were possible,
I would not forget you!*

¹⁶ *See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.*

So, it is on this cold winter day in December of 2020 I declare to you a simple truth! Today we are one day closer to the end of this pandemic than we were yesterday!

The vaccines are coming, and prayerfully these vaccines will allow for the resumption of a more familiar and comfortable life soon. Yet, my friends I truly believe that when we emerge from this time of pandemic, we will carry with us some of the many lessons that we have learned during this time. Prayerfully we will carry forward that truth that we have responsibilities to all people within our community to keep them protected. Prayerfully we will carry forward the functional lessons, that it is OK and even good for us to wear facemasks when we are feeling “under the weather” to keep others protected. Prayerfully we will carry forward the frequent washing of hands and sanitizing during the cold and flu season. Prayerfully we will carry forward how our community of faith and people whom we loved attempted to keep us safe, keep us connected, and keep our faith alive during a difficult season of time. Prayerfully we will carry forward the fragile nature of life itself and remember to let people know we love them before we part company and always attempt to not let anger or frustration rule a day which was always meant by God to be filled with love. Prayerfully we will carry forward the truth that we are each and all loved by God, that God has each of our names and all our names written in the palm of God’s hand and that our Lord is never far away. These and so many other lessons have been shared during this time. Lessons of life, lessons of love, lessons from a God Who has each of our names written in the palm of God’s hand!

Until next time!

Keep trusting God, keep washing those hands, and be a peace with one another!

PJ