“Bigger Than Memory”

Isaiah 49:13–16a

Rev. Henry Pascual

Prayer of Illumination: *Loving God, open our hearts to your Word that we may hear your promise anew today.* Amen.

In her online devotional last week, Cameron Trimble shared a conversation she had with a monk in a monastic community.

Like many monasteries and convents, his community was shrinking—rapidly. She asked him how it felt to live in a dying community.

“I’m not worried about the ending,” the monk replied. “Things come and go. People are born, and then they die. This is the way, the only path of life.”

Then he added something else: “But I do wonder: Who will remember after we’re gone? Will anyone be left who remembers?”

“Who will remember after we’re gone?”

That question haunts us. We fear losing many things in life: our health, our independence, our loved ones, and the familiar places and things that have given our lives meaning.

But perhaps none is more poignant than the fear of being forgotten.

Find an old family photograph, album, or collection of pictures—one from fifty years ago or even older. Perhaps some of you did that last week on All Saints Day.

Look at the faces. Who were these people? What were their lives like?

Perhaps there is a woman sitting on a porch, holding a child in her arms. Or a man working in his garage. You wonder who she was, who the man was, what became of that child. And whether anyone today still remembers their names.

As we grow older, that question becomes more personal.

Friends pass away. Familiar places change. Our health and memories may begin to fade. And in quiet moments, we may find ourselves asking:

“Does anyone still remember me? Does my life still matter?”

And sometimes, the question goes even deeper: “Has God forgotten me, too?”

Have you ever felt that way?

You pray, but hear only silence. You face illness, grief, or unwanted change, and somewhere deep inside, you wonder: Where are you, God? Have you abandoned me?

If you have ever felt that way, you are not alone.

The people of Israel in Isaiah 49 knew that feeling. They were living in exile. Their homeland had been destroyed, and their lives had been turned upside down.

And in verse 14, they cry out: “The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.”

Notice how personal that complaint is. They are not simply saying that life is difficult. They are wondering whether God still cares.

And look at how God responds.

God does not respond as a king, a warrior, or even a shepherd. Instead, God uses the image of a mother—a mother who nurtures, comforts, and protects her child.

Think about the mother figures in your own life. Think of the hands that cared for you, the voices that comforted you, and the quiet prayers offered on your behalf.

A mother's love is one of the strongest bonds we know in human experience. It seems almost unthinkable that a mother could forget her own child.

So God asks: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?”

God expects us to say, "Of course not!"

And yet, we live in a broken world. We know that human love, even a mother's love, has its limits. People pass away. Relationships break down. And tragically, some mothers do fail or abandon their children.

I think of the controversial campaign ad during the recent election. It featured the mother of one of the candidates accusing her daughter of lying. The two have reportedly been estranged since the daughter was a teenager.

It is painful to hear a mother speak such hurtful words about her own child. Of course, I don't know the whole story behind their relationship, and I'm not in a position to judge either of them.

But it reminds us that even the closest human relationships can fall apart, and sometimes even a mother's love falls short.

And that is precisely where God's promise becomes so powerful.

God says: “Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.”

Notice those words: “I will not forget you.”

God does not say, “I will *try* not to forget you.” God says, “I will not forget you.”

There is no hesitation in that promise. Unequivocal. We may feel forgotten sometimes, but God never forgets us. We may feel alone, but we are never abandoned.

And then comes one of the most beautiful images in all of Scripture.

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

In the ancient world, people sometimes marked their bodies to remember someone or something precious. It’s almost as if God is saying to us, "*I have your names permanently tattooed on my hands. You are always before me. I carry you with me. I will never lose sight of you*.”

What good news this is, especially as we grow older. There may come a time when our own memories begin to fade—when we forget names and faces, when photographs lose their stories, and when we must rely on others to remember parts of our lives for us.

There may even come a time when those who once knew and loved us are no longer here to hold our stories, and our names are no longer spoken.

Even then, God remembers.

God remembers the children we once were, the people we loved, the work we did, the struggles we endured, and the tears we shed. Even when we feel forgotten by the world, we remain deeply precious to God.

On this All-Saints Sunday, we read the names of those we hold dear. We light candles and ring the bell in gratitude for their lives and in honor of their memory. As we do we remember that they—and we—are held by something far greater than human memory.

So wherever life takes us, whatever happens along the way, and even when death comes, we can rest in this assurance: We are never forgotten. We are always held in God's love—a love **bigger than memory.**

Thanks be to God. Amen