

Sermon: 5-25-08, Pentecost season

Pastor Phil Lee

Title: "Tattoo You"

Text: Isaiah 49:8-16a

Theme: God will not abandon us

Introduction

- We all make mistakes, and we make mistakes of all kinds! Sometimes the mistake we make is the simple mispronunciation of a word, or turning left instead of right. But, sometimes our mistakes take the more serious form of a moral failure, a sin with serious consequences that damage our relationship with God and others. What then?
- Well, there are corrections for our mistakes! Back in the "dark ages" when I was in college, we used whiteout to correct our typos. Then we graduated to Selectric typewriters with the white correction tape that made corrections automatically when you pressed the right key. Of course, now we've moved on to computers with "Delete" keys, and even better, word-processing software that is self-correcting.
- For you mathematicians out there you remember the early days when you did your math problems long-hand, using a #2 leaded pencil. And, if you were like me, there were many mistakes made and many smudgy erasures to wipe out the errors. Eventually we graduated to calculators and Excel spreadsheets, and the mistakes were easily correctable, sometimes automatically.

Point

- Today, as we gather in worship, we rejoice in God's divine whiteout! It's isn't easy or automatic. As a matter of fact, God's corrective grace came at a great price. In the mercy of Almighty God Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sin when we come in repentance and faith. We thank God for His gracious "Delete" key!
- But, our struggle with mistakes continues if we fall into the trap of doubting that God has deleted our sins through gracious forgiveness, and that God has deleted any memory of us. Many of us make this mistake. In times of sickness, in moments of tragedy, in the depths of depression and hopelessness, in our struggle with guilt, we wonder if God has pushed His "Delete" key and abandoned us.
- In today's OT lesson – Isaiah 49:8-16a – God reassured the ancient Israelites through the words of the prophet Isaiah, as they struggled with thoughts that God had abandoned them in their time of exile in Babylon. Isaiah said: "...the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones."
But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me."
"Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands."
- In the same way, God reassures you and me: "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands."

Problem

- Every parent knows that parenting is not for the faint of heart. Do you ever stop worrying about your kids? Can you?! Well, no. You can't. Even though they make it quite clear as they get older that they don't want us worrying about them, it's like telling

a stream to stop flowing downhill. And it's made more interesting by the fact that at some point along the way, our children start parenting us!

- God is loving parent Who cares deeply for His children, and we can feel the aching, yearning love that Isaiah expresses on God's behalf: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?"
- Of course God cannot forget His children! Even in the midst of tragedy, guilt, sickness, and hopelessness, God will not abandon us! Our names are "inscribed" on the palms of God's hands, and it's not erasable ink! It's a permanent tattoo!

Power

- The first closest known use of the word "tattoo" in English was recorded in the diary of Captain James Cook in 1769. The modern word "tattoo" is from the Samoan word "tatau." A tattoo is a permanent mark made by inserting pigment into the skin, and it has gained tremendous popularity among those who favor "body art."
- God reassures you and me: "See, I have inscribed you – tattooed you! – on the palms of my hands."
- But, some would protest and say that's a nice idea but it's not real because God doesn't have hands! To that protest, the Bible says yes, God does indeed have hands. They are the hands of the crucified and risen Jesus. They are the hands of the one who died on the cross in our place and for our sins, so that when we put our faith and confidence in him, we have the forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation.
- After Jesus' death and resurrection, Thomas said: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A short time later, when Jesus was with him, he turned to "doubting" Thomas as said: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." It was at that point, when Thomas realized that he was inscribed on the palms of God's hands, that he said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"
- Thomas is our brother. As Jesus reached out to Thomas, Jesus also reaches out to you and me with nail-scarred hands, and he says, "Yes, your names are inscribed – tattooed! – on the palms of God's hands!"

Conclusion

- To everyone who wonders if God has pushed His divine "Delete" key and abandoned them, there is this everlasting promise: "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands." I tattoo you!
- Thanks be to God! Amen.