## **God Never Stops Looking and Loving**

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[0:00] I want to extend a very warm welcome to everybody this morning and it's good that we're able to worship God and we pray that every single one of us as we gather wherever we are in our own homes or amongst our families and friends that we will know God's enriching and God's blessing. It's a great privilege to come under his word and to be able to share his word so we pray that God will will bless us all. We're going to begin with a word of prayer. Lord our God we pray to bless us this day another day in our own experience and we pray that you will enrich your lives in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We give thanks again for the word and as we're going to come under it we pray that the word will speak with meaning and with power into our souls. We give thanks that this word is that which teaches us it is a light to our path directing us and leading us in the right way because we do not know the right way ourselves and when we're left to ourselves to make our own decisions that invariably we make wrong decisions but if our life is lived in the light of your favor and face and your word is that which directs us and shines a light upon our path then we are assured that we're going in the right direction and it's awful to go through life going in the wrong direction all the time but we pray that we may indeed be going in the right direction with our eyes firmly fixed upon you in your word. We give thanks that you were told that it is really the only rule to direct us that we may glorify and enjoy you and always help us to remember Lord that that is the main purpose of our existence here in this world is to glorify you. Forgive us Lord when we seek to glorify ourselves rather than you. Forgive us Lord when we lose sight of what we're about and help us also to enjoy you in this life. Lord the potential for huge enjoyment is given to us as we come to know you in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. And may we seek to know you more and more. That was the Apostle's great desire and it was his great delight because the more he got to know of you the more he wanted to know you.

> And so we pray that that might be true for each and every one of us. We pray to bless us all from the youngest to the oldest. Pray for our young people and we give thanks for all the great work that was done during this lockdown in the virtual Sunday school. We give thanks Lord for those who gave of their time and talent and energy. We give thanks Lord for all our young people and we give thanks Lord for the way that they have shown a desire to know more and more about you. And so Lord may they be in our thoughts and in our prayers. We remember the elderly, those who can't do for themselves anymore, those who are dependent upon others. We give thanks Lord for our carers in the community and how indebted we are to them for all that they do and provide. We ask Lord that you will bless them. We pray Lord that you will bless those in our care homes and the carers there. And we pray particularly if it has been such a devastating time throughout our nation in our care homes with the COVID-19 and how many have lost their lives and the heartache for families and for those who work there. And we pray Lord for all the heart, the sore broken, heavy hearts that are throughout our land as a result of this illness and all the additional pains that come with it, the sense of separation and isolation that has been brought. So we pray for all our NHS workers and those who have devoted their time and energy relentlessly over this period. Lord, pick them up and grant them your grace and

Lord, as the country is moving more and more towards the easing of the lockdown, we pray Lord that we will be protected because the worst thing that could happen is there would be a second wave. We would hate that to happen.

Lord, we ask for your protecting hand upon us, not that we deserve, but according to your tender mercy. As it was prayed in wrath, remember mercy. Oh Lord, we pray that that might be true.

We ask you Lord to forgive us our sin. We come before you and ask that you will forgive us our every sin, individually and personally, collectively, within our homes and families, within our congregation, within our congregations, within our land.

[4:47] Oh Lord, deal graciously with us. And we ask that despite what we are and how we have turned away from you, that you will never turn away from us. Oh, please Lord, that you will continue to uphold us and to keep us.

As we come to your word, we pray that we will hear your voice, that we will understand what you're saying to us, that you will bless us with every spiritual blessing. We pray that we might be strengthened if we're weak.

We might, Lord, that we might have light if we're in darkness. We pray that we might have assurance if we're doubting. We pray, Lord, that you will grant us hope if we're despairing. We pray that you'll grant us joy if we're down.

We pray, Lord, that you will bless us in every spiritual and even temporal way. Lord, we ask that you will bless us nationally and internationally, that you will be with our leaders and those in authority over us.

Oh, that they might look to yourself. We're told that righteousness exalts a nation, for that sin is a reproach. And we pray, Lord, that our leaders will look to you.

[5:58] Help us all to look to you. Bless us in this day. Cleanse us, we pray, from our every sin. Be with those who mourn, those whose hearts are sore and heavy. Ask, Lord, that you bring comfort to them.

Be with those who are ill. We ask, Lord, for your healing. Rest a rid of hand to be upon them. Raise them up again, we pray. Watch over us and take away from us our every sin.

In Jesus' name we ask God. Amen. I'm just going to say a wee word to any of the young folk who might be listening in today.

Last week I was talking to you about my great-grandfather was a soldier. And I said that we had quite a lot of things in the house, like medals and belts and such like, that have come down.

Last week we were looking at the bayonet. This week I've got something else. This wasn't about my great-grandfather, but about my granduncle.

[7:01] My granduncle George. My grandpas, my grandfather's brother. And I've got here something that this was what we would call, you could say at one level, a medal.

There's lots of medals that you get as soldiers. And this medal, it's a great big medal. It's put in this kind of wee case. There was a part there that has broken off that you could actually stand on the fireplace.

Because that's where we had it, near the side of the fire. But this has broken off. And you might say to yourself, that's a beautiful medal.

Very hard to wear that in your chest. It's so big. And you have Britannia there with a tripod. And there's a lion. And there's my granduncle's name, George McRae, that was there.

But you know the thing is that although he won this medal, he never actually got this medal. This, it's not really a medal.

[8:08] It's a plaque. And it's a memorial plaque. And it's in the shape of a penny. A great big penny. And do you know what it was called?

It was kind of the nickname they gave it. It's the Dead Man's Penny. It's not a very nice name. The Dead Man's Penny. And I think you can work out what that means.

Is that those who won this were killed in action. And that's what happened to my uncle George. My granduncle George, who was an officer in the army.

And it's quite interesting because my grandfather kept a diary. And he tells us of how in 1917, which I fill him out just now, 1917, Well, it was at that time.

And there was quite a famous battle, the Battle of Arras, which went on from the 9th of April, 1917, on into the second week in May.

[9:08] And the awful thing is that there were 160,000 casualties in these five or six weeks. And on the first day of that advance, as it were, first day on the 9th of April, that was the day actually that my granduncle was killed.

And my grandpa writes in his diary, and he says, This is the blackest day of my life. God word today, and he's writing this on the 14th of April, 1917, My darling brother George was killed in action on the 9th, on the advance at Arras.

That's in France, while leading his platoon. So it's a very sad thing. So this plaque was sent to George's mum and dad.

And there were all over the country, people had these plaques. In fact, this was my grandpa's brother and my granny's brother, John.

He was also killed on the Western Front as well in action. So they both had the dead man's penny for granduncle George and granduncle John.

But what I want you to see today, I don't know if you can make out what it says here, but there's writing on it. As I said, there's the lion and there's Britannia and my uncle's name.

But it says, he died for freedom and honour. You see, he gave us life fighting for the freedom of our country.

And that's why we remember all those who gave their life. We have the likes of Remembrance Sunday. We remember what they did. But we also remember somebody else.

And that is, you could write that over the cross. Although it was written over the cross, Jesus, the King of the Jews. You could also write that, he died for freedom and honour.

Whose freedom? Our freedom. Because Jesus came to set us free. That's what he says. The truth shall make you free.

[11:33] And then Jesus said, I am the truth. So if we accept Jesus and believe Jesus, then we will be set free.

Set free from the power of sin, from the power of Satan. We will be set free to serve God and love God. We will be set free from all the terrible worries that are often in this world when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's nothing greater that we could do with our life than give it to the one who died for our freedom and honour.

And the more we live to Jesus and for Jesus, not only the more freedom we know, but the more honourable our life will be.

So you ask the Lord Jesus who died for our sins, that he will make known to you all his love and that he will come into your heart and that you will know what it is to be free indeed.

[12:41] We're going to say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.

Amen. We're going to read God's Word and we're going to read from the prophecy of Isaiah and in chapter 49. Isaiah chapter 49. We're going to read from the beginning.

Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.

He made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand he hid me. He made me a polished arrow. In his quiver he hid me away.

[13:45] And he said to me, You are my servant, Israel, in whom I shall be glorified. But I said, I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing in vanity.

Yet surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God. And now the Lord says, He who formed me from the womb to be a servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him.

For I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength. For he says, It is too light a thing that you should be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to bring back the preserved of Israel.

I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers.

Kings shall see and arise, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.

Thus says the Lord, in a time of favour I have answered you. In a day of salvation I have helped you. I will keep you, and give you as a covenant to the people to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, Come out, to those who are in darkness, appear.

They shall feed along the way, on all bare heights shall be their pasture. They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind or sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up. Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and from the land of Zion.

Sing for joy, O heaven, and exalt to earth. Break forth, O mountains, into singing, for the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted.

But Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?

[16:28] Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me.

Your bowders make haste. Your destroyers and those who laid you waste go out from you. Lift up your eyes all around and see. They all gather, they come to you.

As I live, declares the Lord, you shall put them all on as an ornament. You shall bind them on as a bride does. And so on.

And may God bless to us this reading of his own holy word. Now in our reading, I want us to focus on the verse 16 of chapter 49.

Isaiah 49 and at verse 16. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me.

[17:30] Now God doesn't want us not to know that we belong to him. He wants us to be absolutely persuaded of our relationship with him.

He doesn't want us to be grumping about in the dark. He doesn't want us to live lives filled with doubts and fears. He wants us to know of his love.

And he wants us to experience the reality of that love. And that is why God's word is so full of wonderful promises. Great, reassuring promises.

And Isaiah, of course, is a prophecy that is full of God's promises to us. Great and wonderful promises. Now at the beginning of the chapter it says, Listen to me, O coastlands.

Now some translations have Listen to me, O isles. And obviously, I prefer that translation because we live in an island. And in fact, we belong, our island is part of the British Isles.

[18:32] So in a sense, our nation is an island. It's just, in fact, when you look at a world map, it's just a dot almost like on its own there.

It's an island and we here in the Western Isles live in a just a wee dot of that little dot. So, I think really what Isaiah is talking about here is the remoteness, the places that are so far off.

And that's part of what I love about God's word is that God and his word reaches everywhere. Now, this chapter that we have here isn't just speaking to us about God's assuring love to his people, but it's also speaking about the growth of his kingdom.

Back at the time of Isaiah, God's kingdom seemed to be centered just in a very small part of the world. But Isaiah, through the Lord, is talking about the spread of that kingdom into the coastlands.

These are the areas that are far off, the places that are remote. And that's why I love where it's focusing in here on the coastlands and the islands because it means that God's word and God's love reaches everywhere.

[19:51] His unfailing and changing love to his people. Now, in verse 13, it tells us to sing for joy because the Lord has comforted his people. But in verse 14, you'll find that the church is thinking the very opposite and it says, the Lord has forsaken me.

My Lord has forgotten me. Now, that must be like a knife into the heart of the Lord. Here are his people who he has loved with an everlasting love and they are in turn saying, the Lord that we have served, he's forgotten about us.

He's forgotten and he's forsaken us. And of course, the Lord cannot forsake his people. And here, he uses possibly the most extreme illustration about forsaking that you can find.

He says, can a woman forget her nursing child? Can a mother now turn her back and absolutely forget and forsake the newborn baby that she has.

And then he says, even though they may forget, which is extremely rare because, and we know that for differing reasons, that can occasionally happen, but it is rare that that would happen.

[21:10] And the Lord is taking this picture because we know of that incredible link and bond and love that a mother has for the newborn baby. And the Lord is saying, however strong and powerful that bond is, my bond and love for you is even greater.

Although it is humanly possible for a mother to turn her back and to forsake her newborn, I cannot, I cannot turn my back and forsake you.

So this is part of the great assurance that God gives us. And then we have this, our text, which is one that we know, I suppose it's one of those that's quoted over and over again.

And he says, behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Behold. Look, listen, that's really what it's saying. Look, I want you to stop and to reflect and to think.

You're making an accusation against me. I can't forget you. Stop. Listen to what I am saying. And this is good to remember that here is the Lord.

[22:17] The Lord, that's who's speaking. That's who's speaking here. Because here's the Lord who cannot lie. Remember, there are two things God can't do.

He can't deny himself and he can't lie. And the God who cannot lie is saying, I cannot forget you. I cannot forsake you. Now, unfortunately, sadly, we are guilty of forsaking the Lord.

We are guilty of forgetting the Lord. Is it not true that often in our lives we'll say, oh, you know this, I don't know where I've been today. My mind, I've been forgetting. I'm forgetting who I am, who I belong to.

But the Lord never, at any point, ever, forgets who we are and never abandons his love to us. And so the Lord says, I have done this.

This is what he says, I've done it. And we've got to remember that our salvation, this is the beauty of it, our salvation, every part of it, has been done by God.

[23:20] It's God who planned it. God who purposed it. God who fulfilled it. It's God's Spirit who applies the work that God's Son did. God the Father purposed and planned.

God the Son did. And God the Spirit applies that work. It's all of him. And that's the beauty because if it was of me, if I, if it was saying, well, you know, I had my part to play.

Well, of course we have responsibilities. Of course we're told to work out our own salvation. But we've got to remember that it's God who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

So, the wonderful thing is that God is at the very heart of everything. It's all of him. And that gives us a great assurance because if, if it was three quarters done by God and a quarter done by ourselves, then there's a strong possibility that it would end up in wreckage because of who I am.

But the whole way of salvation, it has all been done by him. So, the Lord is saying, I have done this. And you know what God gives us when he gives us salvation?

[24:29] He gives us a guarantee. You know, in life we get lots of guarantees with things. You buy something. And every so often you get something and it says lifetime guarantee.

Now, sometimes it's a wee bit fly. Sometimes the lifetime is the lifetime of that particular thing you bought, which doesn't mean that it's as long as you live.

But sometimes the lifetime guarantee is as long as you live. That they guarantee that they will replace, sometimes not by way of our tale, but if there's any fault or flaw.

But there's no company or anything in this world that will include a guarantee that is forever and ever and ever. A guarantee that is everlasting. A guarantee that is eternal.

It's a lifetime guarantee. Well, the Lord alone gives a guarantee that is not only for life, but that goes right through death and goes on forever and ever and ever.

[25:25] It is an eternal guarantee. Our salvation comes with an eternal guarantee written in his blood over it. It cannot be altered or changed.

And how thankful we are to the Lord for that. And then it tells us here, the Lord says, I have. It's not something that he's going to do, something that he's planning, but he says, I have.

I've already done that. I've already done this. And what has he done? He has engraved. And when we engrave something, that is going to last.

It will, when you, you know, sometimes when we want you to remember something, we write on our hands and we say, oh, I've got to do this, I've got to do that. But, you know, if we're rubbing our hands together, it will wash off.

But when you engrave something, it's done specifically and it's done deliberately. And of course, it costs a bit, but it lasts.

[ 26:28 ] You'll see it there. I was looking through a drawer recently. I was looking there at a football medal that I got and it's in 1977.

and it is as clear, which is 40, 40, 43 years ago. And the writing is as clear.

Last week, we were looking at the bayonet and it was a Sunday 1907, which is 113, I hope my math is sorry, but 113 years.

And the writing, the engraving is as clear as ever. So engraving is something that's not going to rub off. And that's what the Lord is saying. I've done this engraving.

But you'll notice he doesn't say, I have engraved your name on the palms of my hand. That would be wonderful. He says something else. I have engraved you.

[27:28] Yes, you. You as a person, all that you are. Body, mind, so I've engraved you on your entire you.

And here we are with all our weaknesses and all our failings and all our faults and everything. The Lord says, I've got you. I've engraved you on the palms of my hands.

Now, of course, the Lord God is a spirit. But he uses our language in order to teach us and to illustrate us what it is that he's actually done so that we will get into our minds just how awesome and wonderful his love is.

Now, hands are part of you. When you go somewhere, you don't leave your hand behind. Your hand is with you. But the hands are kind of a unique part of the body because the hands are always seen.

If God said, I have engraved you on my back, you would say, well, that's wonderful that he's engraved. But he can't see his back because his back is hidden unless we have two mirrors.

[ 28:39 ] but the Lord says, it's on my hands and the palms are my hands. So in other words, the Lord is saying there is no point of any day or any night, but you're constantly before me.

There you are, I've seen you, you're part of, you are part of who I am. And I find that just, it's thrilling, it's exciting. Always. So we have to ask ourselves a question, why are we tempted?

Why are we tempted to think that the Lord will forget? Well, I think there's two or three reasons. First of all, I think there are times we're so aware of how tiny and insignificant we are in the vastness of this universe.

And when we think of the billions of people on planet Earth, and we think of all that is going on in the whole universe, and that God is the one who governs and rules over all, sometimes we say, how?

How can God focus on me? Why me in particular, out of all that's going on all over this world? But that's because we take God down to our level.

[29:50] We take him down to our human level. And God says, I'm not like you. He said, I'm altogether other than you. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways and my thoughts and your ways and thoughts.

we cannot even comprehend the immensity and the vastness and the wisdom and the mightiness and the power. He is omnipotent.

All power, all knowledge, he's everything. And so, despite the vastness of this universe, and despite the millions and billions living in this world, God is watching over you, his dear believing, friend, as if you were the only person there.

It's intimate and personal. And again, sometimes we're tempted to think that God will forget us or forsake us because of our sins. You see, there are times that our sins rise up within us.

And there are times that we are really disappointed in ourselves. And there are times we grovel and we say, Lord, I've really messed up. Lord, I cannot believe that you keep going with me.

[31:06] And there are times that our sin is such that we think, you know, God is going to forsake me because he cannot keep going with me, the kind of person I am.

I'm a failure. I keep failing him. I keep letting him down. One day he's going to say, that's enough. He's going to look at me and say, what a disappointment this person is to me. If I had known he was going to be, if I had known she was going to be like that, he would never have saved him.

God doesn't think like that. He knew everything about you. Nothing has ever happened in your life where the Lord has said, oh, now I've got a shock there. No. He knows your very DNA, everything.

And that's part of the beauty of it, is that our sins, which are many, which are beyond our counting, he has counted them, he has numbered them, and he has placed them all upon his son.

So, if we were to say that our sin is going to make God forsake us, what we're saying is that his love is not sufficient.

[32:14] We're kind of saying that our sin is cancelling out his work, his love. And that's impossible. So, our sins are never ever going to come between us and God.

Yes, our iniquities can separate, and we have to deal with that. But in his overall love, he will never abandon us or leave us. And again, sometimes we're tempted to think that God has forgotten us.

When trials and so providences and difficulties come into our life, when we're really hurt, when really sad things happen in our lives, we sometimes say, Lord, have you forgotten me?

Have you forgotten all about me? My world has just collapsed. And it's very easy to think that God has forgotten all about us. But you notice what it says, and I may be wrong in this, but it says, Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

Your walls are continually before me. He's speaking here to his people, his people who were in Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem, which were at the very heart, the walls of the temple, the city walls, all these walls, were always before him.

But these walls were not always standing. These walls were at times in ruins. the time of the captivity, the very temple was smashed to bits. The temple was in ruins.

The walls, the city walls of Jerusalem were in ruins. And yet, the Lord never stopped looking at these walls, and these walls were rebuilt, and the temple was rebuilt.

And spiritually we can apply that and say, even if your life, you feel that your life has collapsed, and you say, Lord, have you forgotten about me? The Lord says, no, I haven't. I'm still watching over you.

Your walls, the collapse that you are in at this moment, I am still with you in this. You're not on your own. And you know, the Lord is using these things to mold us and to shape us.

And you know, every sanctifying blow that comes into our life is working for us part of the weight of glory that we will one day enjoy. That's what it tells us. That our light affliction, which is but for a moment, work within us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

[ 34:45 ] So God's at work. And the times where these things are hard in our lives, God hasn't forsaken, he hasn't abandoned, he hasn't forgotten, he's still at work.

and he will rebuild and he will make the walls beautiful again. Because you, my believer, by believing in him, you are engraved, engraved on the palms of his hands.

And again, when we think of the hands of Jesus, you know, in a sense, you could almost, there's something, when you think of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and if any person, that wasn't what I was going to say to you, but if any person, just to add to what we were already saying, if we think that because we're going through hard, difficult providences and sore trials that God has forgotten and abandoned us, think about Jesus and the cross.

And if any that were watching would ever say, well, God has really forgotten about him. In fact, Jesus is my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Had God forsaken him?

No. God, at that moment, the Father was dealing with Jesus Christ, his Son. Yes, his wrath and his judgment for sin, our sin, was being placed upon the Son, but the Father's love never changed for one moment, despite the awfulness of what Christ endured on the cross.

[ 36:26 ] sin. So our suffering is not appointed in any shape or form to the Lord's forsaking and abandoning us. But again, when you think of Jesus and the curse, you think of these nails, of how he was pushed, and he was pushed for us on his hands.

And you could almost say in a sense that our sin are like the nails that were put into it. There, you, all, that's who you are. Your sin has pierced the Son of God.

So he was nailed to the tree. These hands that were held out in benediction, held out in love, held out helping, held out healing, one day they're stretched out there.

And he is stretched out with the nail pierced hands. And you know something? These hands today are inviting you. And if you're today listening in and you're not a believer, then I would urge you to get right with God.

And you get right with God by accepting his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who he said to the children is the truth. The truth will make you free. Truth will set you free, will give you liberty in life, for you will rule really enjoy life.

[37:37] Guaranteed you will enjoy life in a way that you haven't been able to. I'm not saying you're not enjoying life now. I remember times when I was a Christian, I really enjoyed life.

If somebody said to me, do you enjoy life? I said, I love life. But I also had a troubled conscience. Of course, we still get troubled because of our sin and such like, but the Lord deals with that.

He has come to set you free. And these nail-pushed hands that were there in Calvary, his hands are outstretched to you today, inviting you to come, to come in.

And you know the great thing is, when you are in that kingdom, you are in it forever. And your name, not only your name, you are engraved love.

And your hands are in it and the hands. Talk of a reassuring love. We're going to sing in conclusion from Psalm 36, and this is from Psalm 36, and we're going to sing verses 5 to 9.

[ 38:41 ] Your steadfast love, O Lord, is great. It reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky. Your righteousness is very great, like mountains high and steep.

Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast you keep. How precious is your steadfast love, what confidence it brings, both high and low, find shelter in the shadow of your wings.

And so on. Psalm 36, 5 to 9, from Sing Psalms. Your steadfast love is sweet, full-led in gracious heaven high.

Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky.

Your righteousness is every great, like our dead is high and sea.

[40:01] Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast unconditioned high,motús is given agradable than flesh Thee 2015 giver is fresh, highs amp more of the share of eye lois The shadow of your wings May be splendid In your hours and dream From streams of your divine

For with you is The source of life In your light we see Now may the grace, mercy and peace Of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit Rest and abide upon each one of you Now and forevermore. Amen.