

**First Congregational Church of Westfield  
Transfiguration Sunday  
February 19, 2023  
Rev. Paul Nesbit**

How many of you had some sort of a curfew when growing up? I am sure that many of heard that when the streetlights came on you were to come in the house. When you were in high school I am also sure you had some sort of a curfew.

These curfews existed in my house. However, kids being kids, I learned that I could sneak my sister into the house while our father was asleep in the recliner. Perhaps it was the old double standard, but I did not have a curfew except for when I got my license at 17. The law of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at that time stated that drivers under the age of 18 had to be off of the road from 1am to 5am. My father told me that I had to have the car back in the driveway by 1am but I could go back out by foot or in the care of a legal driver.

There was a huge element of trust that my parents had with me. I was the fourth child and had seen what the first three had done. My mental list was filled with “well, don’t do THAT” or “that didn’t go over well, don’t do THAT one.” It dawned on me that if I told them where I

was going, with whom I was going, and at what time I'd return, they would never question what I wanted to do. What happens though, is that there are times when circumstances call for drastic changes to the plans and you cannot always notify when this will happen.

When most of us were in our teens and early drivers, cell phones did not exist. "Do you have a dime to make a phone call?" So, if the car broke down, you had a minor accident, or a flat tire, you could not call your parents to let them know you were going to be late unless you happened to be near a pay phone. It was not uncommon for people to go to a stranger's house to ask to use the phone or if they would make the call for them. As long as this was not a weekly occurrence, all would be forgiven and life would go on.

Today's scripture readings remind us to follow the commandments, decrees and ordinances set forth. Even the book of Deuteronomy tells us to "choose life so that we may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors..." The psalmist tells us "Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the

Lord.” And, in our gospel reading from Matthew, we hear Jesus reminding us to follow the commandments.

These things were important for the original audience of Matthew to hear. Remember, they did not read these things until much later as the Gospels were handed down orally. The original audience were Jewish people in the area who had chosen to not necessarily give up all of their religious ways, but wanted to follow the teachings of Jesus as they believed that he was the long-awaited Messiah. In this particular passage, Jesus talks about murder, adultery and divorce.

While not painting a pretty picture, Jesus addresses things that were very real to the people of his time. Murder was an ever present thing as was the sin of committing adultery. But how did divorce come into the picture. It was obviously something that was present even then. These things, in some shape or form, are also present in our lives today.

Believe it or not, I want to talk about divorce. We have people in our congregation who have been divorced and remarried. Let’s talk about what divorce was in Jesus’ time. Remember, the big scandal that the people would remember is that Herod stole his brother’s wife and

took her as his own as he declared her divorced from his brother. This is how John the Baptist literally lost his head. The Baptist proclaimed that they had sinned against God as there was no good reason for them to have divorced.

Today, divorce is present and no longer scandalous in most cases. People fall in love, choose to marry and, in most cases, vow to love until death do them part. They are not aware of what may come their way. They do all kinds of things to make their marriage work when things get rocky. I cannot even begin to get into why these things happen, but they do. It is not for any of us to judge people. The only judge is God. I will say this, though; I believe in a God who is merciful and just, who loves us and wants us to be happy as we try to follow in God's ways as the psalmist says. Some people went through hell and back and the only way they could get their lives back was to divorce. They have made their reconciliation with God and have continued their lives, even to remarry and have wonderful lives where they are contributing members to their church community. We are loved by God!!!

God needs and wants all of us as co-workers to spread the Good News as proclaimed by Jesus. Even as we come together for our annual meeting today, we are serving as God's co-workers. Sometimes, brick and mortar are necessary discussions for this work. I encourage all of us to be present today for that as well. Let us show that we can return God's love in all that we do, say and are. Amen!