

**First Congregational Church of Westfield**  
**Rev Paul Nesbit**  
**March 5, 2023**

“I love you forever...”

I have told you that I was named after my uncle. The “original” or “elder” Paul Nesbit will turn 90 in April. On occasion, one of us will remember to pick up the phone and call, most frequently around our birthdays but at other times in the year. Uncle Paul is a faithful communicator with the Nesbit clan. He is pretty much our source of information about who is doing what and how everyone is. Paul Nesbit, the elder, is also a wise man.

As we share information about our lives and our extensive family, the conversation invariably turns to “what is happening in your churches? What are you preaching on this week?” My uncle, much like the “younger” Paul Nesbit, is fascinated by the concept of God’s love for us. “Paolino (little Paul or ‘Paulie’ in Italian) we have no idea of God’s unconditional love for us. For God so loved the world—the possibilities are endless!”

You’d think that at 60 years old, I’d stop feeling as though I am being put on the spot; it is not at all his intention. Some might say that I felt a little bit like Nicodemus with Jesus in their clandestine meeting. Nicodemus was also at a loss for some words.

This pushed my own reflections to this: God’s love is like the mother in the story, “I Love You Forever.” It is the story of a mother and a son throughout their lives together. No matter what happens that mother picks up her son and rocks him, back and forth, back and forth, and sings “I love forever, I like you for always, as long as I’m living my baby you’ll be.” One day, the mother has grown older and needs the help of her son. He picks her up and rocks her, back and forth, back and forth, and sings “I love you forever, I like you for always, as long as

your living, my mommy you'll be.” That is the same type of love that God has for us; God’s love is unlimited, unconditional, and redemptive.

The unlimited love of God is beyond the grasp of this world. Even the author of the Gospels were tempted to try to put some limitations on God’s love. The apostles are exhorted to love one another, particularly in John’s Gospel. But God’s love is for us and all of creation. This love from God is what moves us to be true stewards of the creation, made by God and loved by God. For God so loved the world, he gave us all of THIS! What kind of love is this?

Well, we have been told that it is unconditional love. I felt a lot better on that phone call with Uncle Paul as I shared we had just talked about it. Unconditional love, however, is not just a “one and done” sermon. It is a concept that we will have to visit and revisit often until it begins to sink in to us. It is not a conditional love where we should think that God will only love us if we are righteous, educated and literate. Some of us think that God’s love is some sort of abstract emotion. God still loves us and this world. Creation is an ongoing thing and we are part of it. As we have said, time and again, we are co-workers with God to spread that love of creation as well as sustain it. We are also still called to be co-workers to spread the Good News—which is part of “For God so loved the world.”

For God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son. God’s love is redemptive! God, through Jesus Christ, comes to save and redeem. We, in turn are called to be in that relationship with Christ to offer that compassion, hope and love for all people and all of creation. We offer service, we offer our prayers, we offer ourselves, we come together to hear God’s word, to share our lives, and remember how he loved us to his death and rose from the dead.

The unlimited, conditional, and redemptive love of God is not fleeting. God loves us forever! We are part of God’s creation. It is my prayer that today, through our Scripture, our

breaking open of God's word, our singing and the music of our choir, soloist and their director, and our breaking of the bread in the Sacrament of Communion, we will all begin to know that love that says to us "I love you forever, I like you for always, as long as your living, your God I will be." Let us revel in that love. Amen.