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There's a cute book I remember reading my kids when there were little.

Love You Forever is a story about a mother's continual love for her son as he goes through the stages of adolescence to manhood. Every night his mother sings to him "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby you'll be", while rocking him as he sleeps. As he grows, his mother recurrently shows her love for him despite his adolescent behavior which seems to be driving her crazy! Even after the boy has grown into a man his mother drives across town to hold him in her arms and sing to him. The mother eventually becomes too old and sick to carry on with this tradition. In turn, the man then drives across town, holds his mother in his arms and sings to her "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living, my mommy you'll be". As the man returns home, he goes to his daughters' room and passes on the tradition, holding her in his arms and singing the same song to her that his mother sang to him.¹

It's a wonderful story about forever lasting love, but sometimes I wonder, "What is forever?" That's a question someone asked in an online forum. One person replied, "It is technically not possible for it to go on 'forever'— what people mean by that is

that the universe is constantly expanding. Which is to say that the end of the universe is constantly and steadily getting further away but is still in fact an end."²

Have you ever thought about forever? Or the unimaginable vastness of the universe? Sometimes time and space seem so huge that...well...we can't even imagine what it's like.

When my son, Jonathan, called me this past February to tell me that they had detected the first gravitational wave, my understanding of the immense size of the universe expanded, though I still find it hard to comprehend. Einstein had predicted that a large disturbance in the universe could send gravitational ripples across space and time, but he didn't have the technology 100 years ago to prove it—but we do now.

Over 1 billion light-years ago two black holes collided and merged, sending ripples into the fabric of space-time, which was detected by the large 2.5 mile L-shaped antenna known as LIGO. The collision a billion light-years ago created "energy 50 times

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greater than that of all the stars in the universe put together,”³ which arrived here at Earth for us to detect and even hear a slight chirp.

Can you even imagine a billion light-years—that’s the distance that light would travel in a billion years at 365,000 miles per second!

But even that’s not forever!

King David had no understanding of gravitational waves or light-years, but through a message and promise from God, David gained a better understanding of forever.

Before David learned of this promise, however, the king offered to create something for God, so he shared his plan with the prophet, Nathan.

“Hey Nathan. I have an idea. I’d like your input.”

“What do you have in mind?” Nathan asked.

“Well, I live in this wondrous palace, a beautiful building made of cedar.”

“Yes, I know. What do you have in mind?”

“God lives in a box in a tent. Don’t you think God ought to have wondrous place in which to

reside? A place where we could gather and worship God that seems, well...a bit more...awesome?”

Nathan replied, “Do whatever you want. God is with you.”

That evening God came to the prophet Nathan in a dream. “Tell David thanks for the idea of making a temple, but I have been traveling around in a tent and it’s worked just fine. In all those years, did I ever ask for a cedar temple? Tell David that I have always been with my people.”

I wonder if David’s plan of building a temple was out of gratitude for all God had given him, or was it a way to try and limit God? I wonder if David thought he could try and capture God in a temple, trying to limit God’s mobility from the portable tent by placing God in a temple where David thought he could control God.

Sometimes I wonder if we have the same temptation today. Let’s build a beautiful place of worship, gather there each Sunday, celebrate that God is with us, think that we can control God to do what we want, and forget to take God into the world

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with us. Sometimes we might even feel it's easier to ask people to come to us than for us to go to them.

Sharon Watkins, our General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), reminded us about our mission to the world. When she spoke to the General Assembly in the summer of 2015, she suggested that

God is on a mission of love to save the world. When God calls people into that mission, I want Disciples to be present and accounted for, don't you? I want the world to be a better place because we are here. More like the kingdom of God because we walk the way of Jesus.⁴

That's what God has been doing through history, don't you think? For many generations God had been making promises, what we often call covenants. First with Noah and all of creation, that a flood would never again destroy everything. And then with Sarah and Abraham, that they would have many descendants. And then with Moses, that if they follow the commandments, God would bless them. But in the book of 2 Samuel we hear of an unconditional covenant, an eternal promise made to

David: I will never take my faithful love away. Your kingdom will last forever.

Not in just the church or temple, but through the mobile tent of you and me proclaiming what Jesus Christ has done in the world. We are signs of God's hope and love in the world. It's a love that goes beyond the walls of our church, beyond the city limits of Elkhart, beyond the state line of Indiana, beyond our national boundaries, and into the world. As so well expressed in a haiku poem I read on Facebook this week:

"I will love my kind!"

God answers back, "No, My kind,
with all My kindness!"

Aren't we sometimes tempted to agree with that first line: that we will love only our kind? When Jesus came into the world, God sent us a message: all of you are my kind—forever. In response, we work together to reach out to those who need our help, as did a community that responded when

A little girl entered the tall prairie grass while chasing a rabbit that ran across the family's homestead on the prairie. Her family had warned her many times

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not to wander into the high grass, but in her excitement to chase that bunny she forgot her parent's warnings. As the rabbit ran farther into the towering grass, the little girl ran farther from the safety of the clearing. By the time the girl realized she couldn't catch the rabbit, she discovered she couldn't find her way home, and the light was beginning to disappear from the sky as evening approached. She called to her parents, but she was now too far away to be heard.

Back at home, her parents gathered the neighbors to begin a hunt for their daughter. They all spread out with lanterns, calling the girl's name. But when they had not found her by dawn, one of the older boys noticed the erratic trampled paths of prairie grass. He suggested that they all join hands and sweep across the prairie, not missing any part of

the search area. After about an hour of searching the grass, someone in the line of people came across the little girl, huddled in the grass, scared and tired.

Everyone began to cheer, and soon an impromptu party began, complete with someone playing a fiddle. The father of the young girl thanked the boy who had suggested the joining of hands. The boy smiled and replied, "I just wish I had thought of it sooner."⁵

It's when we join hands that we continue to offer God's hope to the world—forever.

Take the hand of the person next to you. Say to the person:

You are God's kind/
And God will love you/
Forever.

¹ www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/BookModule/LoveYouForever

² <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080618081508AANgRBp>

³ Dennis Overbye, "Scientists Detect Gravitational Waves, Proving Einstein Right," http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/12/science/ligo-gravitational-waves-black-holes-einstein.html?_r=1

⁴ www.discipleshomemissions.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-Fall-Advocate-Web.pdf

⁵ Story adapted from *Emphasis*, July-August 2003, p. 26-27.