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## **Honor**

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*“Honor your father and your mother, in order that your days be lengthened on the land that the Lord, your God, is giving you.” Exodus 20:12*

Honoring a parent might look like...making your dad his favorite homemade ice cream; setting a clear boundary with your mother who rarely asks how you are and then talks to you abusively when she doesn't get her needs met from you; going out of your way to spend time with your parent because it is so enjoyable to be together; sharing a hurtful story about your parent from your perspective without blaming or shaming them; asking your dad to tell your friends the funny story you heard him tell so many times because it brings delight to him and all who hear it; clarifying that you are not going to spend time with your parent who has hurt you deeply; speaking to your mom with kindness even when she is demanding; understanding that your parent has never tended to their own emotional wounds but not allowing them to take out their woundedness on you; asking your mom and dad to tell you about their childhood... These are various ways we might honor our parents.

Growing up I believed to honor my father and mother meant to respect my parents, obey them without talking back and to treat them with kindness. Respecting my parents wasn't too terribly hard because I experienced great love from them. But what about those who didn't have great experiences with their parents?

I'd like to invite us to look at ways to honor our parents by reflecting on our past relationships with them and how that can happen in all of our varied family systems (both positive and negative), and how we choose to incorporate healing for ourselves and future generations.

I recently listened to a podcast called BEMA which seeks to interpret scripture from the Eastern Jewish perspective, the culture from which scripture was written. In an episode focusing on Exodus 20 they talk about Ancient Eastern wedding traditions, in relation to the 10 commandments. This has helped me to better understand the culture of this time by learning about such traditions. For example, when a Jewish couple was preparing for their wedding, one of the things the bridegroom did was to present a vision or hope from which the marriage could be founded upon. This was called the 'ketubah'. The bridegroom might say something like: 'Here's what I hope our marriage can look like, and then share hopes and dreams of marriage and family. It was not a set of rules to follow, but a vision for their lives together.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the wedding of our son and new daughter-in-law. So many incredible experiences but one of the most touching moments was hearing them share the vows they wrote to each other...a vision and hope for their covenant relationship to be founded upon.

In the same way, as in the Ancient Eastern wedding tradition, the 10 Commandments were established as a vision for relationship with Creator and Creation. When we consider the commandment, "Honor thy father and mother", in this context, it's a vision of honoring the trusted provision of our mothering, fathering God. There is an image of what can be experienced when there is honor within relationships. We trust we can thrive in life because as a good parent, God is giving us all we need and we can reciprocate honor to God and others. God is going to provide for our every need within this imperfect world. This means as we experience challenges by living in an imperfect world, God will provide for us in all circumstances, both joyful and difficult.

So, one of the ways we honor our parents is by reflecting about homes from which we were raised and making good honoring choices for future generations. We can all identify both the good and difficult in our family systems, with varying degrees. We may choose to break a dysfunctional family cycle as well as carry on healthy ways we experienced family. It's a life-long process of asking the Spirit of God to guide us, just as a loving parent would also guide us. When we better understand ourselves and the family systems we grew up in, we can be more aware of how we can create loving relationships into family for future generations. Whenever we experience healthy relationships, we feel better, we function better in the world, we make healthier choices, which leads to more opportunities to live life to the fullest. In that case, it makes sense then that this is the first commandment with a promise that our days would be lengthened. The Israelite's were given "a land that the Lord God had given them" which was out of slavery. In order for their days to be lengthened in this new place, both physically and metaphorically, they would need to live in peace with one another.

Recently my 28-year-old son asked me if we had watched one of the last episodes of one of our favorite series. He said it was all about our relationships with our moms as adults. He then said, everybody feels pretty similar about their relationships with their mom. So, I watched the show and cried throughout because the actors' expressed frustrations with their mom and I was wondering about the frustrations my son may be experiencing with me. So, I asked him the next day if we could talk about the show. He explained that he believed as adults we seem to revert to our younger selves when around our moms... So easily annoyed at how they want to love and take care of us. He said as young adults this both fits with the desire to be nurtured but also conflicts with the desire to be independent. He then thanked me for

teaching him to process his feelings and thoughts so that he could have a better self-awareness and ability to share with those in his life, like he had done in that moment with me. He later shared how one time as a kid he was so angry and didn't know how to express his anger (he actually said, "I was red with anger.") He said I asked him to try to put words to what he was feeling, and then was able to express his feelings of anger in a way that was not hurtful. As we talked that night, I experienced him honoring me by sharing how he learned a positive way of expressing feelings as a child. He was also able to honestly say, without blame, that growing up in our family wasn't perfect, and he's struggled with some things, and yet was also able to say thank you for so many good things.

We also honor our parents by identifying the ways we will find healing from the brokenness in our families. We can choose to refrain from getting stuck in blame, and instead take responsibility to provide for ourselves what we need that we didn't get while growing up. I met with friend not long ago who shared about growing up in a very unhealthy family system. As I listened to how he talked about his experience of being disrespected and dishonored growing up, I reflected on how he took care of himself in his adult years, without blaming and staying angry at his abusive parents. He chose to work through his anger in healthy ways so that bitterness was unable to grow in his heart. He also sought care for his younger siblings. He continues to break the unhealthy patterns he learned in his life. He didn't need to talk about his parents with inauthentic niceties to honor them. He honored his parents by being honest about himself, without telling me how terrible his parents were to him and his siblings. He has also found a way to live into the truest sense of himself and nourishes his soul through healthy relationships with others and by spending time in nature. I see how **he honors his father and**

**mother by becoming an honorable person outside of the unhealthy patterns from which he was raised.**

Here's how this connects to the story of the Israelites and finding ways to heal from our brokenness. God delivered the Israelites from slavery and offers a way for them to experience honoring relationships, not from a list of rules, but as a way to experience heaven on earth. All they have known is living in Egypt which was a kingdom built on fear. An imperial society such as Egypt comes from the narrative of "if you don't do X, Y, Z for security or preservation then everything comes crashing down around you". The narrative from God is opposite as one of Shalom, or peace. We have a God who honors the relationship with creation which invites all to live in trust of God's care. Remember the Sabbath rest we heard about last week? Not simply rest for one day of the week but it's a mindset or rhythm of rest instead of fear. The Egyptians learned to live in fear in order to survive. So, they don't need to simply get out of Egypt, but they needed to get Egypt out of the people...or, this fearing way of life out of their way of being. Anyone I've ever talked to about growing up in an unhealthy home needed to get out of that home. That is certainly the first step. We can move away from something difficult, but the deeper work is to tend to the pain and suffering we experienced as children. If we don't provide for ourselves the love and respect we didn't have as children, then we carry on the fearing way of life. We will repeat the lack of honor we experienced if we do not honor ourselves with the love and respect we were not given.

I want to invite us into a time of reflection. No matter how good or difficult our growing up years have been, or may still be, we all have wounds and sadness we can tend to. God's love is within us, for us, to help us bring honor to ourselves and our parents and caregivers. Honor in a way that is truthful,

kind, healing and establishes healthy boundaries when needed. Once we bring loving compassion to our unmet need, then we can truly honor.