

MAY 18, 2025

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON May 11- “So That You May Live Long...” Exodus 20:17. Luke 12:49-53, Luke 2:13-14

Every year we come upon two celebrations that are merited, yet complicated. These are mother’s and father’s days. Certainly we should take time to be thankful for the men and women in our lives who have loved and guided us through the years. More and more, however, we are faced with the reality that these celebrations are not one size fits all. Trying to squeeze any one specific push leaves out countless other experiences of motherhood, fatherhood, and how it is to be a child through myriad ways that our parents or we as parents have succeeded or failed.

This morning rather than try to push any one direction we take a bigger look at parents, the commandment that addresses them, and what might seem a confusing statement about the reality that Jesus’ coming to the world means.

The command is often shortened when we speak it. “Honor your mother and father”. The fullness of it adds “that you may live long in the land God has given you.” This is an important layer.

First, I want to dispel something that I’ve had questioned to me, and that I’ve had to unpack myself because for the longest time the thing questioned was a misunderstanding that I shared.

I had taken this commandment to mean “obey your mom and dad.” This isn’t what it says, though its often understood as such. The question comes with wondering what to do when our parents model or instruct us to do something that conflicts with God’s will for our lives. What if a parent tells us to steal? What if a parent asks us to get drunk with them, or do drugs with them? What if a parent tells us that dishonesty and cheating are normal and even necessary parts of life to embrace? One of the common threads among most prejudices is that they are passed from parent to child.

What do we do?

Fortunately, this command isn’t about blanket obedience to whatever our parents tell us to do. This isn’t to say we ignore them, rebel just to rebel and so forth. Of course we are to respect our parents and learn from what they have to offer us. But that’s not this command.

A large part of this has to do with that second half of it. “That you may live long.” This isn’t some kind of divine hocus pocus. It’s rooted in something that informs some other expectations we find in scripture.

The expectation was that when parents aged the children would care for them. There was no nursing homes. No social safety net. There weren’t pension plans. There was family. Honoring your parents meant caring for them in their old age.

This is why women who were childless and husbandless were in dire straits. They wouldn’t have someone to watch over them. This is the standard to take care of widows. If they had no husband, and no children or the children weren’t living up to the expectation they were in a hard situation. The community around them was called to pick up that slack.

For those with children that were seeking to follow God, they would be taken care of by those children. The sense is that if you wanted to be cared for by your children in your own old age, you needed to model and exemplify that in caring for your own parents. Pass that down from generation to generation. Thus you could live long in the land.

It didn’t say anything about agreeing with your parents. It says nothing about even liking your parents. It simply says to honor them, and that meant care for them in their later years.

This reality makes the story of Ruth all the more inspiring and significant. Ruth and Naomi is often recounted on Mother’s Day. The story sums up as follows.

Naomi and her husband were Israelites who moved to Moab during a famine. Their two sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. All three men died. Naomi offers to her daughters in law to be released from any obligations to her or her family. She encourages them to return to their family, their gods, and their culture to find husbands and move on with life. She had no more sons to offer in marriage and if they decided to stay and fulfill the Israelite tradition of marrying the next son in line to

bear children in their dead husband's name they would be out of luck. Naomi was past child bearing and even if somehow she remarried and could, by the time the sons were of marrying age Ruth and Naomi would likely be beyond child bearing or the relationships simply wouldn't work.

Orpah takes her up on the offer. This isn't out of line. She did what Naomi asked, and given the circumstances it made all the sense in the world. Ruth on the other hand stayed by her side.

She gave up her gods and her culture to embrace Naomi. She knew full well that this meant that she may remain husbandless and childless the rest of her life. She knew that in Naomi's culture this could mean poverty and destitute with no one to care for them. Yet she stayed by her side. This is impressive.

Times have changed in many ways and in others they have not. We have assisted living and nursing homes. We have caregivers that will come to your home to give aid. There are many ways to care for parents and others who are on in years outside of having them in the home. Yet often we still see this occur. Children build an "in-law" suite for a set of parents to have a comfortable place to stay. I know my parents had my grandmother live with them in the last years of her life, giving practice and rubber meets the road voice to this command.

That this command exists and seems to not have condition on it is instructive for us in our present day not just in the family but beyond it as well.

Let's move to the gospel of Luke for a moment. At the beginning the angels at Christ's birth say "and on earth peace". It might seem that the coming of Jesus was to usher this in. Yet later in that same gospel Jesus claims that His coming would set father against son and mother against daughter. This is the opposite of peace. Seemingly it's countering the command to "honor" mother and father.

Considering this in the context of their culture, however, His words make all the sense in the world. Whether Jew or Gentile, to put your faith in Jesus was not to risk just holding a controversial viewpoint. It was to risk life and limb. We see this in the Jewish reaction to Paul's preaching and the Gentile persecution that would later follow.

To see Jesus as Messiah was blasphemy to the Jewish people. People were stoned to death for this offense. To see Jesus as divine and King was to stand against Rome. It was traitorous and subject to torture and death. These were the stakes.

It was no minor disagreement. To put one's faith in Christ was to take a stand that was passionately hated by Jew and Gentile alike. This is where the severity of disagreement in a household would lie. In America today, we don't have this severity. No one is at the threat of death for their faith. The stakes are nowhere near as high. Yet people find reasons to break relationships, disown family, and so on over matters big and small. We are free to believe and think as we choose without worrying about being executed. Paul has a couple things to offer perspective.

He says that "as much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." He writes this in Romans, which means that he's telling them in the midst of people who don't believe in Christ, and who likely hold some VERY different attitudes on a multitude of issues, to make sure to keep relationships amicable.

This makes sense in two major ways. It makes sense as ambassadors for Christ. Living at constant odds, in constant tension, and head butting with everyone isn't going to provide a foundation for spreading the gospel and inviting people into relationship with Jesus. And that was the primary goal. Additionally, when your faith carries a potential death penalty with it the last thing you want to do is tick off people who could easily report you to the authorities and make life miserable for you.

In other words, learn to get along even when you disagree.

When it comes to marriage, in Corinthians he is writing to Gentile Christians. These would have been marriages that initially both partners were not believers in Jesus. So what happens if one comes to faith and the other doesn't? Paul has an answer.

If the non-believer wants to stay in the marriage, stay. Your presence might persuade the spouse to come to faith in Jesus and it's important for any children you might have. If the non-believer wants to walk away, let them. You are no longer bound by the marriage.

But note this. On the part of the Christian the expectation is that if the other wants to stay in

relationship, stay in relationship. Don't run off over a disagreement. Stay because that's where Christ might be revealed in the midst of the relationship to one who hasn't come to faith.

There is no sense of cutting and running over difference of opinion. I suggest that this would apply to the command to honor mother and father. You may not agree, perhaps even significantly. This doesn't take away the call to honor mother and father.

These are people under threat of death agreeing to be in company and relationship with people who don't even share faith in Christ, let alone interpreting the rest of their ideas through His lens. How is it that we see Christian today at each others' throats, breaking fellowship, and treating other with such harshness and contempt? What happened to this kind of grace and mercy that these early Christians held so dearly?

I'd like to offer that what we need to model for others the good that comes from exchanging a "yeah, but" mentality for a "both/and" perspective.

"Yeah, but" is when I get called out that I'm holding an unloving attitude or behaving in an unloving way and I say "yeah, but" and go on to make an excuse why I'm allowed to do so. I might even try to make an appeal to some cherry picked scripture.

"Both/and" is when I get called out about the same and my response is more "okay, I still have this concern, how do you suggest I handle it with a more loving perspective?"

One makes excuses and has trouble holding love and disagreement in tension. The other recognizes that we can BOTH maintain the bonds of fellowship and love even AND hold stark differences of opinion on some matters.

This should be particularly present among believers. The foundational agreement of Jesus as Lord is present and that should guide the spirit with which we come together. When one or both parties can't engage in love and understanding, Jesus has left the conversation. Paul says if we have love we have nothing. Jesus tells us that love is the one hallmark by which people will know we belong to Him.

Not love with excuses about why I'm allowed to also be hurtful, crass, and cruel. Genuine love that does the hard work of getting over myself in order to "be at peace with everyone so much as it's up to me".

Remember, this sense of holding bonds goes back to our command about children and parents. And living long in the land. How does it all shape up?

In the days of this command it was about provision for those who are aging. That was associated with long life. Today we understand a few other things.

There are two things that we know cut lives short. Stress and loneliness. Stress is at a clear high. Even those who would claim otherwise tip their hand when all it takes is one comment, or scratching the surface of some hot button issue and they turn explosive and anxious. People are high strung and wound.

Loneliness is considered at epidemic proportions. It isn't just technology. It's the division. The more we're willing to break fellowship with people over disagreement and the more people justify harsh and ignorant words and actions, the more isolated we become. The more people write off others, the fewer people are found to be in community with.

This cuts lives short. Want to live long in the land? We have things in place to help with food, shelter, and such. But these things that depend on relationship depend on us. Getting over ourselves in favor of living at peace and having the opportunity to influence one another for Christ.

Viewing others as the enemy is someone else's rule and motivation. Not God's.

Don't get me wrong, there are relationships that if the other becomes abusive and hostile we may have to distance ourselves. This isn't the desired outcome. The desire is even amidst our differences to treat one another with dignity and grace, maintaining bonds of family and friendship for the sake of the gospel and one another.

It's no secret that family isn't just blood. It's much more. If honoring means caring for, we are called to honor not just our parents but also one another.

Today, make a call or visit to a or many special women in your lives to let them know they are appreciated. Beyond that, we must also adopt the perspective with one another that unity is preferred over division. Find ways to overcome the disagreements that so many have used as reasons for angst and cutting people off. As much as it's up to you, live at peace with all people.

As we do this, we forget the bonds that Christ calls us to forge. Peace with others not so oddly goes along with peace in our own hearts, minds, and spirits. Honor your mother and father. Honor one another. That you may LIVE LONG in the land.

BIBLE STUDY 2 Samuel 22

Chapter 22 is very much a Psalm of David. It rings just as the poetry and hymnody in the Psalms do in praise of God. While the text of the chapter is long, the message is relatively simple. There are a few other details worth noting.

The chapter opens with a long, passionate praise of God. As the book is drawing to a close we see the heart of David reflecting on all that he has endured in his journey from shepherd to king. It has been long and hard fought, with God being his strength throughout.

The imagery is another example of why Biblical literalism is a problem. The style of writing is clearly poetic, which lends itself to exaggeration, metaphor, and evocative illustrations. We know that God has been active in David's story. That said, we also know from the reading that God was not, like Zeus, literally shooting from heaven at David's enemies, had not come riding down on cherubim as if on horseback, nor been seen with smoking nostrils.

All of this is intended to give us a picture of a God that zealously defends God's people. That God is mighty, and even shares in our emotions of anger at times. These moments when such images interject into what reads otherwise more as history are important to point out. Those who claim the entire of the Bible has to be taken literally rarely, if ever, actually do so. Particularly when faced with chapters or passages like this. The application of literalism is much more convenient and used to support theology already arrived at rather than allowing the scripture to speak for itself.

This exaggeration is no more present than in David's claims of blamelessness and righteousness.

Anyone who has read 1 and 2 Samuel knows that this isn't true. David is many things but innocent isn't among them. The argument might be made that if God had forgiven David then "technically" he was pure. This is hair splitting that wants to dismiss David's faults, and in doing so glosses over a much bigger and more comforting truth implied in the writing.

The only acts that we have seen David actually repent of are his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. This only occurred when he was found out and his infant son died. There is no sense that David had any sense of repentance over his continual failings as a father in his handling of Amnon and Absalom. Sorrow? Yes. But nothing indicates repentance or confession of wrongdoing. And let us not forget that on the run David had robbed and completely slaughtered ever man woman and child in travelling bands of foreigners. Again, not a sliver of sense that he was sorry or repented of the violence, theft, and murder.

David is far from perfect. Yet God still has worked with him and honored David's faithfulness despite his shortcomings and failings.

Were God to only fight for and with the blameless we'd all be in trouble. Were God to only fight for and with the blameless, David would have been in trouble.

The language of the Psalm elevates David's innocence even though we know otherwise. Does David see himself this way? Perhaps David is relishing God's forgiveness and expressing his heart in overflowing words?

Regardless, because of our knowledge of David's story we can take an almost inverse truth from this portion of the chapter. Even though we aren't perfect. Even though we'd sometimes like to think we're better than we actually are. Despite our imperfections and faults, our trust and faith in God is never ignored. God is always there to walk with us through our trials. As we look back at our lives, it is good to see those moments when we received undeserved grace, and when God brought us through a

situation not because of who we were in the moment, but because of who we would become after the fact. The God that delivered and imperfect David can and will deliver an imperfect me and you.

The chapter finishes with David once again returning to lavish praise on God for God's faithfulness to him. While David uplifts himself to a degree in the center of the chapter, declaring his own innocence, that isn't where he leaves it. It would be inappropriate for this song of praise to end with the focus on David. It returns to focusing on the one who brought him to where he is, making sure that the focus is properly placed.

As 2 Samuel is coming to a close, we are reminded of the long story that came before. The message is clear. No matter how long and hard the journey, look to God for strength, guidance, and deliverance. We know that it might not always come in the form that we ask. We may not understand the moment to moment. But when we grow older, if we have sought God through it all, we too can see how God worked through good, bad, thick and thin to create who we have become.