

How 2 Equals 10: Jesus and the Ten Words

June 17, 2018

4th Word: *Honor your father and mother. Exodus 20:12 and Luke 15:11-32*

Question: "Who is most unhappy in the Parable of the Prodigal Son?"

Answer: "The fatted calf!"

So we celebrate Father's Day this weekend and lift up the 4th Word of God: Honor your father and mother. I chose to share the story from Luke's Gospel as well, not because it is a story in which a father gets honored – so much as it is an example of an honorable father. Far more effective, I suspect, than commanding a child to hold a parent in honor is to actually parent in a way that models the parenting attributes of God. But I am getting ahead of myself! I first want to set our stage today with a couple of observations.

As I have been working to deepen my understanding of the Ten Commandments we inherited from the Hebrew faith and how they underscore the two commandments of Jesus mention, I have been led to shift from calling these commandments to words. In fact, the Hebrew itself uses the word "Debar", or "word" and says that God spoke all these words --- not all these commands! Teaching or instruction has a more compelling image and ring to me than command, which can easily become legalistic and lifeless. So today, we have God's words, spoken about our relationship with our parents.

Probably you know that these ten words of God have a division: The first three are about our relationship with God and the last seven are about our relationship with others. As clear as God is that our primary relationship, the one singular and consuming relationship, the relationship with God Almighty, has singular significance in the "god arena" – equally fundamental to all our human relationships is the relationship with our parents. And though I chose to skip in our preaching series to God's words about parents today in acknowledgment of our celebration of fathers, there is another significant connection that I wasn't even consciously aware of when I made the shift. Indirectly, the honoring of fathers and mothers is linked with the honoring of God – basically, the way a parent models the honoring of God in their lives will influence how their children honor them! So today is doubly endowed with weightiness: honoring parents who honor God and whose influence shapes our lives!

So as we are looking at the "Spirit of the Law" behind the "Letter of the Law" in these ten words from God, we recall the Good News of last week, *Have no God but me before your face*. As we are paying attention to God, we are gifted with God's love and grace pouring into everything we do – not just confined to an hour of worship or a time of prayer. The God who is constantly in front of us is intent upon shaping us and our world into vessels of love and grace. What more marvelous news can there possibly be? With the Lord God as our focus, all of life is altered and infused with God's gifts of love and mercy. Maybe you already experience that to be true. Or maybe you are still learning ways to stay fixed on your relationship with God through the day. The spirit of God's first word to us is the Gift of God's love is always available to us – the God who names and claims us is right in front of us all the time, even at the times when we turn our gaze away from God.

Our story in Luke's gospel is about a son who turned his gaze away from his Father. Ok, he big time rebelled against his father, wished he was dead by asking to have his inheritance and then, when dad graciously – or crazily gave it to him, he took off for the far country and blew it all on riotous living. Interesting note in the story was that when the famine came and he had nothing, the boy hired himself out and began to work! He didn't run back home tail between legs to beg for mercy. His first response to the mess he found himself in was to get a job and make an effort to be responsible. Clearly, some parenting had stuck with the boy!

It is only after slaving away and not getting ahead – or even enough to eat – that the boy realizes that the slaves at home with daddy are better off than he is. How could things ever get SOOOOOOO bad? He devises a plan. He will NOT try to reinstate himself as a child. He will simply confess his sin and ask to be put on the payroll like a slave. Ahhhh, this story is deep with imagery. So off he goes.

The father, who has been watching every day from the living room window the road down which his son disappeared, hoping against hope to see him return, spies him from far off and runs to meet him! He hugs and kisses him and the son rolls out his spiel but the father doesn't acknowledge the confession at all, he simply orders the servants to get the robe and ring and sandals and kill the fatted calf. PARTY!

Everyone is rejoicing – until the older brother finds out what is going on and has a pity party out back – I was your slave and you never gave me a rotisserie chicken for me and my friends...BUT THIS, YOUR SON, who ruined the family fortune and name comes back home and you kill the FATTED CALF! I slaved for you – instead of viewing his dad as father, he viewed his dad as slave owner! Rather than a relationship of love, it was a working relationship. How could things ever get SOOOOOOO bad?

Pretty simply, things can get bad. Relationships can go south. Unintended hurt can become divisive and wounds fester rather than heal.

There is a tiny little word that sums up how things get bad. You know the word...three letters...the middle letter is an "I". This is an appropriate construction because it is when I get stuck in "first position" – how I feel, what I want, what I think....that sin kicks in and we drop all our awareness of respecting and honoring – and even loving the other.

In this story both sons sin – both let "I" take over! The first is obvious: sow my oats, have a good time, who cares about dad or family? The second son – sin of envy, comparison, pity – proved unable to rejoice at the new life of his brother because he is so dead in his own life he doesn't really have a relationship with father at all. He sees himself as a slave, working for his slave-owner Dad!

Could it be that God's first word about human relationships calls us to cherish and hold precious our first relationships – with father and mother – and by extension, all family, because how we treat one another at home just naturally informs how we treat people outside those walls?

As we lift up and give thanks for our fathers today and all who parent and protect and nurture and guide us, we know that our earthly fathers, while none perfect, were given to us by a heavenly father who is. And the love poured out by our father God is enough, more than enough, to kindle in us the humility and forgiveness and love for one another that God had in mind when he first gave the 10 words – that Jesus had in mind when he summed them up in Two: love God, love those whom God loves; that we experience here at table and take with us to share in with a world so hungry for compassion and mercy that it acts out more vividly even than the younger son.

Come – receive God's love yet again. Be filled and formed and shaped by the Compassionate, merciful Father of the Universe. And then go, with the face of God's love ever before you, to heal the world. Amen.

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