

1 Sermon, February 5, 2012

Texts: Exodus 20:1-17, Matthew 12:45-50

Title: "Promises – to our Parents"

1. Jesus sort of honored his parents
2. How do we honor our parents?
3. By living out the values of your heavenly parent

1. Jesus sort of honored his parents

We've been looking at Promises this season of Epiphany, and today we look at the promises that children make to their parents. I'd like to start that out by thinking about Jesus, and his relationship to his earthly parents.

Jesus was *not* the model of a dutiful child.

The only story we have of his childhood is that of staying at the temple and discussing things with the scribes while his parents thought he was with the caravan going home. Not exactly dutiful.

Then there's the story of Jesus and his mother at the wedding at Cana. They went to a wedding, and the host was running out of wine, so Mary, the proud mama, thought that *her* son could take care of it. But when she approached Jesus, he replied,

"Is that any of our business, Mother—yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me." (The Message)

And the Contemporary English Version says it a little more respectfully:

"Mother, my time hasn't yet come: You must not tell me what to do." (CEV)

In any case, Jesus was not the model of a dutiful child, who did everything his parents told him to.

You can imagine Joseph may have wanted Jesus to carry on the family business. Did Jesus do that?

Joseph and Mary might have wanted him to get married to the very nice daughter of their friends in the next village. Did Jesus do that, and get married at the normal young age?

Did Jesus fulfill the expectation of a son in that culture, to earn a living and look after his parents in their old age?

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Do you think Joseph and Mary would have wanted Jesus to go away, travel all around the countryside sleeping wherever, and then be put to death by the Romans?

If Jesus had fulfilled the normal hopes and dreams of a parent in those days, he would not have been the messiah.

Yet Jesus did follow the ten commandments. He did honor his father and mother.

He did it by fulfilling the values of truth and love and sacrifice. He did it by being obedient to God, God who had made his parents, God who was behind every good thing.

Today's reading from Matthew is a little story that has made me wonder over the years.

Why would Jesus' mother and brothers be waiting outside the house where Jesus was, and why would they send word in to Jesus, rather than just coming in and meeting Jesus? And why did Jesus refuse to go to them?

Oh, you can say that Jesus had more important work to do, and that he was trying to create a community where many people were his mother and brothers. You could say that Jesus had bigger fish to fry. But that doesn't seem to cut it, somehow.

To me, the most logical explanation was that Mary and Jesus' brothers were convinced that Jesus had gone off the deep end. They thought that Jesus had gotten too big for his britches, and was doing things no poor boy from Nazareth ought to be doing. In other words, Jesus' mother and brothers were ashamed and worried about Jesus, who was acting all out of character for an uneducated laborer's son.

They may even have thought Jesus was crazy.

I think it's most likely that Jesus' mother and brothers were there to kidnap him and take him home and somehow make him play the role that the oldest son was supposed to play in the family.

I can hear them wanting to say to Jesus, "You've had your fun, Jesus, now come back and do what you're supposed to do."

And Jesus refused to play their game. Jesus refused to come out.

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We know that, later on, Mary became convinced of her son's role and stood by him when he was on the cross. But it's very likely that at that time, Mary was not too happy with what Jesus was doing.

2. How do we honor our parents?

So what does that mean for us?

What does that tell us about our relationship with our parents?

How do you honor your parents?

A little story:

My wife, Marianne's great-grandmother Eloise, was a very strong personality. When her husband abandoned her with seven children, she coped by sending the sons out to work in the slaughterhouses of Omaha. For many years, the sons would send their paychecks home to Mom, and she would take care of things.

In fact, Marianne's grandpa married quite late, because he knew his mother didn't want him to get married. In fact, whenever one of her sons got married, the daughter-in-law became the worst person in the world, and the son became the least favorite son.

Should Marianne's grandpa and his brothers never have gotten married? Or should they have gone against their mother's wishes?

Or what about the opposite? I know a woman whose brother has consistently gotten into trouble, been in jail, and has had a history of never paying back his parents what he has borrowed. Yet the parents are planning to move and allow their son to buy their home on a land contract.

Is it right that the son should do what his parents are asking him to do, and take advantage of them?

3. By living out the values of your heavenly parent

You can see that honoring your mother and father is not the same as doing what they tell you to do. Parents aren't always right, or even good.

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In fact, it's healthy to break away from your parents.

Instead, honoring them is being obedient to God, who created them.

Most often it would involve being an emotional and spiritual support to them.

Sometimes it means being a *financial* support to them. But for most of us, we don't give very much back to our parents. We just pass the gifts along to the next generation. As Ecclesiasticus says, "what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you?"

Both Marianne and I have had money conversations with our parents. We've talked to them about their financial situation, and vice-versa. They have been important conversations to have. We don't want there to be any surprises when one of us dies and we suddenly have to cope with the finances of the other.

Talking about finances is one way we can respect our parents.

Clearly, one of the greatest gifts we can give to our parents is time. Just being with them.

We can also remind them of what we've learned from them. Parents ought to know how much they have helped us to be competent and caring adults.

But perhaps the greatest gift we can give to parents is to live our lives in the very best way we know how. Our parents want to see us thrive, and love and be loved, and live a good, faithful, moral life.

A man named Harvey, who I met in one of the very first churches I served, once asked his son: "Promise me that you'll never do anything that would make your parents ashamed of you."

His son made that promise, and it helped him make his parents proud.

I could go on about the number of faithful adult children I've met over the years who have faithfully cared for their parents. There are some among us today who have done very beautiful things for their parents.

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And I could tell you about the young woman who, when her best friend started to use drugs, told her friend it was wrong and separated herself from her friend.

She lived out her parents' values.

Thanks be to God for all the faithful children who honor their parents, even though it usually means breaking with them in some way.

"Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Exodus 20:1-17, NRSV.

"While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Matthew 12:46-50, NRSV.