

2020 HINDSIGHT “UNCONDITIONAL LOVE and HONOR”
BMZ Regional with Mary Ann Floerke August 16, 2020

Welcome to BMZ Regional worship. Glad you are here with us at this time. We are still in this different mode of spring and summer 2020, aren't we? And WHERE is summer going? It's all about upcoming school now. September 1st is not far away!!

Pastor Stan has been preaching from the Great Commandment, the Great Compassion and the Great Commission in recent weeks – 2020 Hindsight! We've looked to the story of the Prodigal Son and the UNCONDITIONAL love shown by the father when he welcomed the prodigal home.... Ran out to meet him.... Was truly WAITING for his son, wasn't he? Think about that UNCONDITIONAL love WE receive from our heavenly Father through His son, Jesus. I love John 3:16..... “For God so loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Talk about unconditional love for us from our heavenly Father! And the story of the prodigal lays it right out there for us on a human plane, doesn't it? We're going to look a little more into UNCONDITIONAL love and HONORING parents today. My parents BOTH lived into their 90's and all of my grandparents lived into their mid 80's. So I have been truly blessed with grandparents and parents in my life. I continue to keep them all near to my heart even tho they are all gone now since my dad's death at age 90 in 2007 and my mom's at 93 in 2013. I know it's not like that for many who have lost parents and grandparents at much younger ages. But we have memories of one kind or another, don't we? We're going to look today toward UNCONDITIONAL love and HONORING others.

Let's pray and then we'll get at it.....

You can please have your message notes and connection card handy as we begin with the Old Testament book of Exodus.... We're looking to the Old Testament book of Exodus which shares with us the 10 commandments. Exodus 20, verse 12 says: “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” Exodus 20:12 This commandment is called the centerpiece of the 10 Commandments. The first 4 commandments deal with relationship with God – and the remaining 6 deal with our relationship with each other -- This first one in the ‘relationship with each other’ category deals with family... an important place to look, right? That places the family in the center of God's Top 10 here at #5. Unless people learn to live together in the family, they aren't likely to learn to get along with anybody anywhere, are they?! The family structure has always been an important part of Judaism and has contributed to the survival of Judaism thru the years. Surviving the Holocaust and thousands of years of anti-Semitism has placed importance on Jewish family identity and the sense of order that comes from it. It doesn't matter where the Jewish family is on the Sabbath, when the Sabbath comes, they stop and pray. It didn't matter what Hitler and all the powers of Nazism did, when Passover came it was time to tell the story once again, even if the family was gathered in a concentration camp and there were no candles to light. There was that sense of order and identity that gave them roots and strength and perspective and discipline and preserved the strength of the family order. At the heart of that family structure of Judaism was a reverence for parents, a high regard, a respect, an esteem for the older members of the family – unconditional love and honoring. The elderly were honored and cared for in the culture of Judaism. The Brothers Grimm give us insight into this commandment in a rather stinging fairy tale that goes like this:

Once there was a little old man, of trembling hands and feeble eyes, whose uncertain table habits became increasingly offensive to the daughter-in-law with whom he lived, until one day she objected vigorously to her husband, the old man's son. She and her husband took the fumbling old man to a corner of the kitchen, set him on a stool, and gave him his food in an earthenware bowl. Now he was no longer troubling them by his dribbled food; now the tablecloth was no longer soiled by his trembling behavior. One day, in his trembling, he dropped the bowl and broke it. Now the daughter-in-law ceased even her moderate civility. “If you are a pig,” she said, “you must eat from a trough.” And they made a little wooden trough, and he ate from it. The pride of their lives was their own 4 year old son. One evening they noticed the boy playing with blocks of wood in the serious fashion which children so often invest in their play. When the father asked what he was doing, the boy said with an engaging smile, “I'm making a trough to feed you and Mamma out of when I get big.” For a while the man and woman just looked at each other, not saying anything. Then they cried; & then they went to the corner and led the little old man back to his place at the table. They gave him a comfortable chair, and put his food on a plate. And never again were they really, deeply troubled by the food he spilled or by the dishes he occasionally broke. They had learned that, in honoring a parent, they possessed their own future.

What do you think? Pretty profound, isn't it? Sometimes it takes something THAT ‘in your face’ to get you thinking of unconditional love and honoring. As we grow old, And perhaps feeble And as we fail. How will WE want to be treated? How have WE treated others?

Now, the world was different when the ten commandments were first received. It was an agricultural society....It was families in agriculture together with the whole family working together for the common need and for the common good. It wasn't necessary to plan for "family time" as it is in our day and age because families were together MOST of the time... There were also NOT the agencies, government helps, nursing homes, assisted livings, home health agencies, hospice care that are part of our society now and available to supplement family care. They didn't exist in this agrarian society at the time of Moses. Our society is more of an urban culture where children are often lucky if they see their parents for one meal a day. Most children have lunch at school as well as many having breakfast at school. Working shifts, single family settings – kids involved in so many things and parents as well...Kids back and forth from one home to the other--- Many times families are NOT together even for the evening meal. When together all the time like that in the past, parents were definitely the moral teachers in the family by the way they lived and treated others. Some parents of today have abdicated that role. And then they and society complain about the schools and what a poor job the schools do in this area of teaching morals...A cynic looking at the current scene may say -- *Honor your father and mother* -- WHAT is there to honor??? That's sad, isn't it? But at times we do feel that way! We shake our heads at the shortage of worthy role models in a society that seems to make so much of entertainers and professional athletes --- and then the headlines go bad...But social scientists tell us that when asking young people to name their heroes, the majority still put dad or mom or both at the top of the list! They think well of their mom's and dad's, even if we would question their choice. Family instinct runs deep!! Family instinct can stand up to a shocking amount of abuse and broken trust and countless disappointments when parents don't follow through as needed and promised. BUT later when the children become adults, this can change. For those seeking help from psychiatrists, their problems can most often be traced to some kind of parental failure.

Let's look again at this fifth commandment **Exodus 20:12** *"Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.* It doesn't ask for a greeting card sentiment toward your parents, nor even that you love them.... It insists rather, that we **Honor our parents.** For some, that is easy.... Their parents were basically kind and loving people....Not PERFECT, but memories are bathed in gratitude. But the commandment doesn't say *honor the parents* IF they deserve it! NOR *honor the parents* to the DEGREE they deserve it. There are no exceptions, explanations, nor extenuating circumstances in the words of this commandment. Just honor your father and your mother..... One of the things 'honor' means is to listen...

Sometimes it's hard to listen to the slower thinking and slower sharing of parents.. we live in a society where so much emphasis is on the children... for children it's on themselves...Always wanting things, doing things... we've spared the rod and spoiled the child often. Their lives end up without rules, guidelines, directions, and even without well defined values. And so, respect, listening and being obedient have sometimes gone by the wayside. It's not so much the fault of children as it is the fault of parents lack of teaching and guiding the children. The word is "children, respect your parents by listening to them." But also for the parents: provide the setting in your home where children WILL be taught to listen and be obedient! To honor our parents also means being attentive to them. One of the saddest experiences we have as pastors is visiting in nursing homes and seeing people wasting away emotionally, as shriveled in spirit as they are in body because of lack of attention from those who should love them most. That's hard. How MUCH they need our attention as they grow older and are removed from the setting of their home and family, or are cut off from places they have lived and people they have known. It's been their life for many years! OK... how DO children learn to listen and be attentive leading to honoring? They learn it in a setting of mutual respect, where every person is counted important, where every person is given the floor to speak and is heard with love and appreciation, where every individual is given an extravagant measure of attention because every person is counted precious.... In the home! In the family! The parents need to do their job with the children all along, don't they?

Paul teaches about the Christian home in Ephesians chapters 6. **Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. Ephesians 6:1** And in verse 4: **Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. Ephesians 6:4.** Note also we need verse 4 with verse 1, don't we?! We can't have one without the other....Parents are not to provoke and anger their children and the children are to obey and do the right thing! These verses are the pattern of the Christian home, and the foundation for Christian relationships within the family – persons respecting each other out of their unconditional love and commitment to Christ. Out of homes like that, come children, who will honor their fathers and their mothers. It doesn't stop there either.. Paul also pulls that 5th commandment to his time. And it still applies for us today too. Paul says **"Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."** **Ephesians 6:2-3** That's reason to honor your father and your mother...So that things may be well with you And YOU may live long on the earth!!! As in the fairy tale I shared earlier, children DO learn how to treat their parents by watching how their grandparents are treated.

But the rules also operate at a broader, more philosophical level. Our whole social structure is built on the foundation of the home. If children do not learn to honor their parents, they are given little basis for honoring their parents, they are given little basis for honoring anything or anybody: teachers, police officers, religious leaders, employers, government. Oh, my, we do see this in many circumstances in our culture today, don't we? Thus the commandment – honor your father and your mother.... not simply because it appeals to us to do so and not necessarily because they deserve it, BUT honor them for our own sake and for the sake of the future of our nation and the future of our children, grand children, greatgrandchildren.

We don't get much of Jesus life growing up in the Bible.... We do get the story of when he was 12 and journeying home his parents realize he is not with the big family groups when traveling. They must go back and they find him in the temple... he had become engaged in conversation with the learned teachers of the law who were "amazed at his understanding and his answers." We are then told in Luke: **Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart. Luke 2:51.** Luke realizes that Jesus could have asserted some independence from his parents after this experience of recognition and esteem at the temple as a 12 year old boy, and Luke wants his readers to see how significant it is that Jesus returns to being just a village boy who obeys his parents! Jesus was therefore "honoring his father and his mother," wasn't he?

We also read in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 7 that it is the duty of parents to instruct children in the law of the Lord; they were not only to keep the laws themselves, but to verse 7 **"Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Deuteronomy 6:7.** God's laws are the end of the matter, aren't they? And the value of parents, is in the teaching of God's ways to their children. Think of how in current culture so many parents have abdicated their teaching responsibility. That's a good reason for churches to reach out with Vacation Bible School/Fam Jam, Sunday School, Wednesday night Sunday School, Family Church, isn't it? There again, with our changed society here the family is NOT working together as it did in the time of Moses, we are trying to build other ways to fill in some of those gaps created by societal changes.

We say: "Our hope is in the next generation" But if the work of teaching is not done by the CURRENT generation, the next generation will not be any better off morally and spiritually, will it? It's the CURRENT generation that needs to lay a foundation of ethics for the next generation to be the hope. **Our true hope is in the CURRENT generation,** I believe!! We need to take action and get involved in our own families and in helping others. It takes a village..... Honor your parents, honor your heritage.... and your days will be long in the land -- your future will be unlimited. Too often in our culture parents tend to abdicate the parental responsibility. It's expected the schools will do the job... Or some social agency... or perhaps some new law that gets passed. It's easy to say: "Kids just don't listen, do they?" But sometimes the problem is that kids DO listen! That's exactly how they come up with the standards that they do! The failure is not in their listening, but in the adults speaking in the culture. There needs to be speaking done that is winsome, convincing and filled with integrity and unconditional love because this speaking will need to be heard over a bewildering bevy of competing voices. BUT the next generation IS still listening.... And like every generation before it, and as we mentioned earlier, it still gives greater weight to a parental statement than to any other. THAT can be the bad news/good news of the day, can't it?

Speaking of the influence of parents: PARENTS are not just blood or adoptive. Every person who reaches adulthood gains some sort of parental influence over some younger person. Say what we will about the failure of younger people to respect their elders, they still do. That's where they get their ideas and their standards whether we want to admit it or not and whether THEY want to admit it or not! **"Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you. Embrace this good commandment.** It's a lovely gift of heritage for us. Do you want to have a future? Then accept the blessings of the past. Would you like for tomorrow to radiate hope? Then ponder yesterday and the people who have made it – especially the people closest to you. They are not perfect – even as we are not perfect. But they ARE our foundation... And we must wisely build upon them. As we reach out to others with God's love and care... As we share our hearts for those who do not yet know Jesus in our communities and in our families As we invest and invite to bring others to know Christ and receive salvation... I challenge you - as you leave this day – and each day this week... To look at a house, apartment building, condominium, trailer park, farm or estate within your eyesight and remind yourself that the future rests on that house and millions like it. All of our institutions – educational, law, government, world peace – rest ultimately upon this fine point of adult/child respect and integrity. Under God, the future is unlimited. We will dwell long in the land if we honor our father and honor our mother and love unconditionally. Go and carry out that duty this week!

(Let us be in prayer)

Be sure to mark your NEXT STEP TODAY

Have a blessed week as you grow in your faith and honor others with a love like God shares – UNCONDITIONAL love to others. May you also be showered with God's love and care and live a long full life in this land! Amen!

MY NEXT STEP TODAY IS:

I will memorize Ephesians 6:2-3

I will read Ephesians Chapter 6 this week.

I will attend the BMZ Bible study on James on Sunday's or Wednesday's during August and September (more info at www.bmzchurch.org)

I will give my heart to Jesus for the 1st time today.