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First Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ  
East Hartford, Connecticut

October 14, 2012

*Deuteronomy 6:1-9*

Honoring Father and Mother

(Fifth in Series, The Ten Commandments: More Than They May Seem)

*Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. - Exodus 20:12-*

Before God gave them the Ten Commandments the ancient Hebrews had some extraordinary experiences. Those children of Abraham were slaves in Egypt and then they escaped to freedom through the Ten Plagues and the other events of the Exodus. Next they wandered around the wilderness while living in tents for forty years, about the span of two generations. It was only then that God gave them the Ten Commandments and it was only after promising to follow the Commandments that the people conquered the Promised Land and became an independent nation with a unique culture. That culture was grounded in the covenant promise made with God at the base of Mount Sinai to keep the Commandments. The generation that first committed to the covenant with God had experienced for themselves how God had rescued them from Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness.

But what of generations to come? Would they honor the covenant which their ancestors made? Future generations would not know what it was like to be slaves in Egypt or to escape through the Red Sea, or to be provided manna and water in the wilderness. They would not have seen the lightening or the thick cloud, or heard the thunder and the trumpet blast while standing around the mountain. Nevertheless, it would be critical for each succeeding generation to reaffirm the covenant. If they rejected it, the character of the nation would change and the people would eventually lose their national independence.

And how would each new generation come to know the covenant and the importance of keeping it? They would need to learn about it from the previous generation. *Honor your father and mother so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*

Now, what do you think? Was it easy for those ancient Hebrews to pass down the covenant? Of course not! Things were changing from one generation to the next in ancient times too! Let us not think that modern people are the only ones to experience a generation gap.

Can we use our imaginations a little bit here and consider how ancient Hebrew youth living in the Promised Land may have responded to stories of slavery and privation in the wilderness? We are told that the Promised Land was overflowing with milk and honey. By present day standards we might not say that ancient Hebrew youth in the Promised Land had it easy, but surely they had it easy compared to the generations of the Exodus. Would it be so far fetched to think that ancient Hebrew youth in the Promised Land would have considered the ideas and commitments of previous generations less relevant than they once were. Can we hear what youth might have said back then? “Come on, Dad! Come on, Mom! We are no longer in the wilderness. We are doing fine now. The way the Canaanites live isn’t that bad. They throw good parties with great food and they really know how to dance! The covenant doesn’t matter anymore!”

Is not the difficulty of passing down values that do not change always this—so much else does change? Isn’t it always difficult for parents to teach their children that some things do not change when the children are well aware of so many things that do change? Isn’t it always difficult for parents to convince their children that the parents know some things better than the children do when the children know other things so much better than the parents? Don’t you think that ancient Hebrew families were in that same sort of situation?

In my work with young people, the older I get, the more obvious it becomes to me that there are many ways in which I have fallen behind the times. I do not text message. I am not on Facebook. I can not begin to name the latest bands or the style of music they play. I still get the difference between charter schools and magnet schools confused and assume that college still takes four years. I remember once having a problem with my cell phone that I struggled to resolve for a while at a recent youth mission workcamp. I finally gave up and asked a young person for help. With speeding one hand dexterity and flying fingers she had it fixed in thirty seconds.

Young people, you know so much more about so many things than I do. I think it may be wise for all parents of high school and college students to admit the same. And yet I want you to respect me and what I have to say about other things, things which I believe have never changed and never will—things like trusting in God and taking the teachings of the Bible seriously, and living in every way that you can with kindness and compassion. I don’t claim to always be right and some day when you are adults you may remember things that I said and conclude that I was just wrong. That is as it should be. But for now, unless it is really, really clear to you otherwise, what I say and what your parents say, and what your teachers say, I hope you will try for now to give us the benefit of the doubt. We may be wrong, but really, when you disagree with us, the odds for us being correct now about life issues are so much greater than the odds are for you being correct. Learn about life here at church, and at home, and at school. At least you know that we love you and have your best interests at heart. For goodness sakes, please do not to learn about life from the entertainment media! It doesn’t have a clue and it doesn’t care about you! *Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*

There has always been a generation gap and I see no reason why there will not always be one. But parents, know that your children are listening to what you say and watching what you do, even when it seems that they are not. Instinctively they trust you even when they don't understand you. Keep talking and keep listening. Discuss everything, argue if you must, be willing to learn from your children and I promise they will learn from you. What more important job will you ever have than to teach your children about the things that never change?