First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

Dr. Suzanne Allen

Message: “The Promise”

Series: Big 10+

Scripture: Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-4

We are continuing in our worship series on the Big 10+…the original big Ten Commandments plus a few more that have been added along the way.

As a way of thinking about today’s commandment to “honor your father and mother,” I want to start by thinking about Big 10 football. I hope your team is doing well this season. And your coach too. Big 10 coaches are often larger than life. They are often the school celebrities. At the college level the players graduate or move on, but the good coaches stay.

Sometimes that goes to their heads and they forget that the rules apply to them too. But we won’t talk about those sorts. We want to talk about the good ones. A good coach stays humble. They stick to the basics. They care about the players. They respect them. They see the best in them. They help them grow in their strengths and grow through their weaknesses. They help create unity and appreciation on the team.

To be a good coach takes vision, persistence, love for the players and the game, and a good dose of humility. But you can have all of these qualities and more, you can be the best coach of all time, but if you’re missing this one thing, your coaching is wasted.

This one thing that makes all of the difference is having players who are coachable. It doesn’t matter how good the coach is, how hard they work to get through to that player. If that player doesn’t want to be challenged, if that player doesn’t respect and honor that coach, then everyone will miss out. They will waste an incredible gift.

Maybe one day they will figure things out on their own, they hard way. But it won’t be nearly as quickly and effectively as if they would have just listened and been coachable.

The best players are coachable. They know there is more for them to learn. They know that they can’t always see the bigger picture. Often the better the player is, the closer they are to the coach. There is a reciprocity and partnership that develops.

So now let’s shift to the Big 10 commandments. In football terms, today’s commandment might read like this: “Listen to the coach. Honor and respect your coach and you’ll be a better player, win more games, and have more fun.”

In faith terms for life, God puts it this way, “Honor your father and mother and things will go well for you.”

Your parents are given to you to coach you, to teach you, and to shape you, to in the words of Joan Chittister, “to parent your soul beyond self-centeredness to wholeness.” They want the best for you. They are passionate about you. They have wisdom to share with you. They want things to go well with you and for you.

This is their job description: to be God’s representatives in teaching children that life is a gift, that how we live makes a difference, that our actions have consequences , and that God’s way is one that leads to life and love.

Like the best coaches, parents cannot guarantee that we will win. All they can do is give us the best tools and strategy to do so. And then it’s up to us to take them and use them. It’s up to us to be coachable. It’s up to us to honor our parents by listening to them and learning from them, trusting that they want the best for us and have wisdom to offer us.

But isn’t it interesting how often we’re not open to coaching, or parenting by those who know us best and love us most? And sometimes even as we resist those who know us best and love us most, we are too open to those who don’t know us as well or care for us nearly as much.

The commandment reminds us to honor, to listen, to trust, to be coachable when it comes to our parents. God chose them just for us and gave them this job.

Now most of us hear this commandment and immediately think of children who are still at home, who are not fully grown up yet. Yes, it is for them, but it is even more so for adults whose parents are getting older, who might not be able to do everything they used to. In many places in the scripture this commandment is paired with instruction in taking care of elderly parents. Do not despise them or abandon them. Do not neglect them.

Instead, honor them. Care for them with the same tenderness that they cared for you. Remember how they set their schedule around you? How they cleaned up after your messes, listened to your stories and played your games and sang your songs over and over again? Remember how they helped you through tough moments of growing up?

Now it’s your turn. Honor their gift by returning it.

But even as you are returning it, you are paying it forward, to the next generation. Your children learn how to treat their elders from you.

There is a Fairly Tale that the Grimm Brothers tell about this. This version is told by

Joy Davidman in ***Smoke on the Mountain***:

Once upon a time there was a little old man. His eyes blinked and his hands trembled; when he ate he clattered the silverware distressingly, missed his mouth with the spoon as often as not, and dribbled a bit of his food on the tablecloth. Now he lived with his married son, having nowhere else to live, and his son’s wife was a modern young woman who knew that in-laws should not be tolerated in a woman’s home.

“I can’t have this,” she said. “It interferes with a woman’s right to happiness.” So she and her husband took the little old man gently but firmly by the arm and led him to the corner of the kitchen. There they set him on a stool and gave him his food, what there was of it, in an earthenware bowl. From then on he always ate in the corner, blinking at the table with wistful eyes.

One day his hands trembled rather more than usual, and the earthenware bowl fell and broke.

“If you are a pig,” said the daughter-in-law, “you must eat out of a trough.” So they made him a little wooden trough, and he got his meals in that.

These people had a four-year-old son, of whom they were very fond. One suppertime the young man noticed his boy playing intently with some bits of wood and asked what he was doing.

“I’m making a trough,” he said, smiling up for approval, “to feed you and Mamma out of when I get big.”

The man and his wife looked at each other for a while and didn’t say anything. Then they cried a little. Then they went to the corner and took the little old man by the arm and led him back to the table. They sat him in a comfortable chair and gave him his food on a plate and from then on nobody ever scolded when he clattered or spilled or broke things.”

“Honor your father and mother.” This commandment urges us to be coachable by our parents, to listen and to learn from them throughout our lives. And then when our parents grow older and need our help, it means to care for them in the same tender way they have cared for us.

And when we do, this is a powerful witness to our faith, to the value and beauty of family. They are a gift of God to us, as we are to them.

When we have this kind of love, respect, care, coach ability, God promises, it will go well with you.

May we do so, honor our parents that it might go well with us, in Jesus’ name.