

Psalm 145:8-14

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,

to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

'Honor'

It's fitting that this commandment should fall on this weekend. This past Friday we celebrated America's Independence Day. Two hundred and thirty two years ago the Declaration of Independence was signed by brave men, intent on 'dissolving the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them.' In 1777, long before America was certain it would win the war with Britain for independence the first Independence Day was celebrated, complete with fireworks. The dream of independence was worth celebrating, even if it wasn't a reality yet.

What is it with fireworks? They are basically cardboard tubes filled with metal powders, salts and other compounds that produce a certain effect when burned. Pack in a little gunpowder, throw in a match, step back and wait for the crowd to roar its approval. Since at least the 12th century fireworks have been a

part of celebrations. Around every neighborhood one can see them this time of year. Fireworks are a way we celebrate Independence Day.

There is something magical about Independence. It's a point when a country, or even an individual, has advanced to a stage where they feel they no longer need parental or international guidance. No more do they need someone to watch over and protect them. They are ready to throw off the cloak of governing and assume responsibility and control over their own destiny. But what does it mean to be truly free? How free can one ever be? What are we free from? And what are we free for? Do we have certain responsibilities as a free people?

This fifth commandment is one that seems to demand of us some careful thought and consideration about our responsibility to those who helped us reach our independence, about those who knew us as dependent infants and continue to demand certain responsibilities from us.

'Honor your father and your mother.' As with all the commandments, we have choices in the way we look at this particular one. My dad and I spent the weekend building a bathroom. Maybe all the commandment demands is that I ask nicely for the hammer, help him carry the 2x4s, and watch to make sure he doesn't pass out from the paint fumes. We can take the simplistic route and limit the command to simply mean that we are charged to be respectful and loving to our parents, honoring the sacrifices they have made to raise us by displaying our gratitude and our love to them at all times. We can ensure they know our gratitude and are not abandoned as they age. In these ever-changing times, the responsibility of children to look after their aging parents is becoming more and more common as our medical advances keep individuals alive longer and longer. Many grown adults are now trying to understand how to care for aging parents who can no longer care for themselves. We come full circle, as our parents had to look after our every need when we were children, and now we must look after their every need as they age. How do we do this with honor and respect? It is a challenge to many who are engaged in so many different aspects of life. It is also a challenge for the church, to ensure that we are taking the time and energy to help others deal with these challenges. How are we helping others honor their father and their mother? How are we aware of the

situations of those around us, and how are we reaching out to help one another? How do we as a community fulfill this responsibility to all of those who are aging?

This commandment continues to expand as we expand our understanding of who fathers and mothers are, but it also expands as we define what it means to be a child. These commandments were handed out to all of the Israelites. This one wasn't set aside specifically for children, so they would be respectful and obey the wishes of their parents. And yet we have all been children, and we continue to be children. We are each a child of the living God, the God in the heavens, the God of this earth. Each of us is a child, with God as a gracious parent. Jesus taught us to pray to God our Father. Isaiah tells us that as a mother comforts her child, so shall the Lord comfort us. So what does it mean to live as a child of the living God?

I believe we have to return to this idea of independence. Some independence is to be celebrated. America could no longer live under the oppressive reign of a king, and so they threw off those shackles. Independence could not come soon enough for those forced to live under the tragedy of slavery. Independence cannot come soon enough for those who live today under the influence of drugs or possessed by a desire for wealth. We long for those sinful desires that we have to be thrown off so that we can be free of them.

And yet we can never claim to be completely independent. For we are children of God, we depend upon the living God to grant us life, to give us each day, to give us our daily bread, as we pray in the Lord's prayer. This past Wednesday we discussed what it means for God to give us daily bread. What is our bread? Shelter, food, love, water and money are all things we mentioned as things that we need every day to survive. Life itself is a daily gift of God. We cannot provide that on our own. We depend upon God for our daily living.

We also depend upon God for redemption. It seems like so many of our efforts are like those fireworks; they are packed with our efforts, designed to be beautiful, and when we finally release them to the world they are, for a moment, beautiful, and then our sin and brokenness breaks in and they slowly fade away, dissolving into the night, beauty for a single, fleeting moment until we find a way to make a mess of things yet again. For thousands of years humans have been sinful, broken people. In Romans Paul writes

that he does the very thing that he hates, such is the power of sin. He cannot do the good he desires. Indeed, even when we focus all of our strength upon serving God, sin breaks in and finds a way to derail us. It is a part of who we are. Human strength and power cannot break this bond.

Thankfully, it doesn't have to. For we depend upon God for this. The Israelites used elaborate rites and sacrifices to atone for their sins. For us, we point to a small, wooden cross, standing upon a hill. It represents the ultimate power of sin and death, for our Savior was raised upon the cross and for a moment it looked like sin and death would have the final word.

But God's power, God's wisdom, is so much stronger. This power and strength that defeated death so that we might have life is the power and wisdom we depend upon. We depend upon it for the forgiveness of sins which could come no other way. We depend upon it to continue to strengthen and sanctify us, to continue to heal our brokenness and point us in the right direction, to continue to bless us with the gift of day after day in which we get a chance to rise in the morning and try again, to try to live as God has intended us to live.

We depend upon God for forgiveness, and we must depend upon God to lead us, to set our sights upon the things that are good, the things that are right. Just as a parent teaches a child to live with manners and respect, just as the church promises in baptism to raise the children to be disciples of Christ, God sends the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts and minds so that we might be windows to God, so that others may look at us and see the love of God. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus says that if your child asks for a fish, how many among you will give them a snake. Or if a child asks for an egg, how many will give the child a scorpion? His point is that if we, sinful and broken people, know how to give good gifts to our children, then surely God, in God's infinite wisdom and strength, will know how to give us good gifts so that we continue to grow as disciples.

So our duty is to honor. We must honor our fathers and mothers among us. As children we were dependent upon them, and so we must honor them by treating them with respect and love, seeking to fill the needs they have, giving of our time and energy to serve them. We also must honor God our Father and our Mother, God our Creator, upon whom we are dependent for all of our blessings, for all of our life. We must

honor God by seeking out the will of God in our lives, by praying without ceasing, by listening, by study, by service, by loving each and every moment, each and every child of God. We must honor God, acknowledging our dependence and not fighting to do this all on our own. We cannot. We cannot give ourselves life, not through grand efforts and certainly not by worrying about the future. We must instead strive to thank God for all the gifts we have and striving to use these gifts to proclaim the name of the one upon whom we depend upon for every good gift, for every good moment, for every good thing in this world. Let us thank God every day that we can depend upon our Rock and our Redeemer. Let us go into the world and not declare our independence from everything, but let us be sure that we use the freedom we have responsibly, as a freedom to do what is right and a freedom to reach out in love and tell all of the Good News of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Let us pray.