

How Do We Honor Our Ancestors?
Joshua 24:29-33
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
November 2, 2025 (All Saints Sunday)
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Today is a bittersweet day.

It is sweet because it is an opportunity to pause and to remember people who have mattered to us, people who made a difference in our lives and in our communities.

It is bitter because the reality is that no matter how long we have together, those years aren't enough - there is always one more conversation we would like to have or one more memory we would like to create.

The reality is that we are remembering lovely people who we miss.

And as we do that, our conversation turns to the question of how we honor them. Because while missing them is real, there is more that we are called to do.

We read this scripture today from the end of the book of Joshua. It's not one we read very often. It isn't one we pause with often. Mostly, if we read it at all, we read past it. We understand it to simply be a transition, a moment that moves us forward with the next generation.

But I wanted us to sit with it for a minute, because this, too, is about honoring the ancestors.

And did you notice the ways that was done?

Now, we might mostly have noticed the burials. The ends of three people's lives are spoken of in this text, two that died in that time, one who had died many years before. And the burials of all three are mentioned.

But this reading is about so much more than simply the mechanics of the rituals around the end of life. Because it also talks about how they were honored.

Joshua, the one who had led the people into Canaan after Moses' death, dies here at the end of the book that bears his name. But it doesn't just say that Joshua died and was buried. Rather, the next verse says, "Israel served the Lord..." The legacy of Joshua was faithfulness to God.

Joseph is mentioned. Joseph, whose story we heard way back in the book of Genesis...Joseph, who had died so many years earlier in the land of Egypt...Joseph, whose bones had been brought with them out of Egypt and who was now settled in the place Abraham had been promised. Joseph's legacy is one of covenant.

The reality is that as we remember those who have gone before us, we don't only look back, but their memories move us forward. We are invited to live in ways that honor the legacy they left us.

So, how do we honor our ancestors?

Our friend Diane exuded hospitality. She was the best hostess, right down to the perfect napkins. She welcomed people with a warm drink, a sweet treat, and more importantly an open heart. We honor her when we open our lives to welcome people and offer them loving care.

Our friend Bill knew how to make people feel seen. He built relationships, not just with the powerful and influential, but with those who worked in the service sector, those who struggled, those who needed a friend. We honor him when we pause long enough to see another, when we learn their name and their story, and give them our time.

Our friend Janet made everyone feel special. If you knew Janet, you knew that she loved you and loved you for who you were. And you might have believed deep in your heart that you really were her favorite. We honor her when we interact with people in ways that make them feel like the most special one on earth.

Our friend Wilma was remarkably honest. She was a breath of fresh air in the way she couldn't hide her love for her husband and her children, but also in the way she was willing to talk openly about her grief and her struggles. In the best way, whatever was on her mind she would share, sometimes surprising us with a funny comment, other times inspiring us with her deep faith. We honor her when we live honestly and openly and fully as ourselves.

Our friend Ruth collected people the way some people collect antiques. If you were in her orbit, you belonged to her and she would take care of you and call you family. We honor her when we give others a home and a family.

Our friend Jan was generous. She was always willing to give of herself and her time, showing up for her family, for her friends, for her community. She knew that her life was about more than just her and so she shared herself and her resources in ways that made life better for others. We honor her when we live generously with others.

Our friend Carolyn was quietly courageous. At a time when working women were not the norm, she didn't only work but she was a pharmacist, a career dominated by men. In the midst of a traditional upbringing, she found the courage to break out of the mold and to develop her own dreams and opinions. We honor her when we step with courage toward things that matter to us.

These and others we remember were gifts to us. And so today we remember the best of who they were and we ask how their strengths can inspire us in our living.

I wonder who you are remembering today and what gifts they offered you.

All contents copyright of the author.

I wonder what commitments or characteristics of those who have gone before you will inspire you to live differently.

I wonder who taught you about love and generosity, about honesty and courage, about relationships and hospitality, about faith.

I wonder how you are different because of those who have loved you.

Our scripture tells stories of people who died and were buried. But those stories tell so much more than that. They are stories of those who were remembered and who were honored by generations to come. They are the stories of those who mattered to people whose lives they touched.

May we hold in our hearts our treasured people and may we honor them by living the legacy of the best they offered to us. Amen.