

Joan and I are heading down to the farmhouse after meeting, where we will visit the cemetery where her Apple ancestors are buried, this being the weekend to remember those who've come before. The passing years have improved the character and reputation of some of them, as time has a way of doing. We remember them with a touch more fondness than we felt for them when they were alive. When her Uncle Clarence was living, he could be aggravating, but now I kind of miss him. He had an opinion about everything, which at the time upset people. But now I miss the drama and verve that marked our time together. Our family gatherings aren't nearly as interesting with Clarence not there to warn us about communism and the United Nations and going off the gold standard.

So we'll go tip our hat to him, then walk over to where Joan's mother and father are buried, and honor them, as the Ten Commandments say we should. *Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land.* It is the fourth, or fifth, commandment, depending on the version you are reading, and the first commandment with a promise. If you honor your parents, your days will be long in the land. When the Bible talked about your days being long in the land, it meant just what it sounds like. You lived to an old, old age. This was back in the days when someone's virtue and faith was measured by the length of their lives. God gave the gift of years to the virtuous.

But today, we realize there is no correlation between one's virtue and age. So I would simply translate this passage thusly—*Honor your mother and father, so that you will be blessed*. And what is the blessing? Well, that's what I want to talk about this morning.

As I said, this is the first commandment with a promise. Because God knew some parents were not worthy of honor, did not deserve tribute, and that their children would have to be talked into it. God had to bribe them with a long life. If our parents were good, we don't need to be bribed. Our gratitude and homage will happen naturally, without inducement.

That's just my theory, I might be wrong.

Now let's do a little review. We've been talking these past few weeks about holding on and letting go. We first talked about how we know when it's time to let go of traditions, beliefs, and practices; and concluded that it is time to let go of our customs when they hurt or exclude other people. Last week, we talked about the inevitability of letting go of status, and that we can do that gracefully and graciously, or we can fight it. But that what is left when we lose our status is the true self. The surface, the veneer of our lives is gone, and what is revealed underneath is our authentic self.

On this Memorial Day weekend, I invite us to think about our ancestors and what it means to honor them. To honor our ancestors is to hold on to them. It is to let their best virtues inform and shape our lives. Their best virtues. Sometimes we let our ancestor's worst traits inform and shape our lives. My grandfather Hank, who had many wonderful qualities, could also be cranky. We called him Hank the Crank behind his back. Whenever I'm cranky, I justify it by saying, "Well, I got that from my grandfather." as if that excuses my rudeness. I have let his worst trait inform and shape my life. We honor our ancestors by replicating their best qualities, by holding onto their merits, not by repeating their worst ones. And when we do this, when we learn from the best they had to offer, and incorporate those virtues into our lives, we are blessed. This is one side of the coin. We honor our ancestors by being grateful for and replicating what was best about them.

And here is the other side of the coin. We honor our ancestors, and bless our descendants, by letting go of their unhealthy and destructive traits. We say, "At one time, I let my ancestors worst behaviors inform and shape my life, but no longer. I am going to let those things go. I am going to lift those harmful behaviors out of the gene pool, so they don't corrupt the next generation." So we let them go. And when we let them go, we let our anger about them go also. As you let the worst things about your ancestors go, you will be blessed. It isn't as if you're denying their failures. You are deciding to no longer let their failures from yesterday poison your life today.

Now if your parents and ancestors were destructive people, if they imposed heavy burdens on their children and grandchildren, you honor them by not replicating their behavior. As you do that, you will experience blessing, most often in the form of peace of mind, which is a pretty good blessing. But as I said, that can be hard to do if your parents weren't good parents, so God sweetens the pot. As we forgive and let go, we are blessed with peace of mind, and we're less likely to pass those same destructive tendencies on to our children and grandchildren.

Remember the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis? Joseph was kind of a brat. He had several brothers, and would go to his father and fink on his brothers, so he could get on his father's good side. His father was not an altogether wise man and allowed himself to be manipulated by Joseph, even giving Joseph a magnificent robe, so that thousands of years later a play *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* could be performed by high school students around the world. This angered Joseph's brothers, who ganged up on Joseph and were going to kill him, but decided at the last moment to sell him into slavery in the land of Egypt, which they did.

Joseph, although a brat, was a very bright young man, proving that duplicity and intelligence often go hand in hand. He soon caught the eye of the Pharaoh who, in exchange for Joseph's saving Egypt from a horrible famine, gave Joseph great power and much wealth.

The brothers who had sold him into slavery, traveled to Egypt to beg for food, for their land had not escaped the famine. Joseph recognized them, though they failed to recognize him. He was still angry with their treatment of him, so made it difficult for them. But in a tender moment, when he realized they shared a common love for their father, disclosed his identity to them and began to weep. He forgave his brothers and kissed each one of them. They, in turn, forgave him for being obnoxious. When the Pharaoh learned of their reconciliation, he was deeply moved, and urged Joseph to invite his entire family to live in Egypt, which he did, and they did.

It is a beautiful story about letting-go, of Joseph and his brothers no longer being enslaved by bitterness and anger, of honoring what was best about their family, and letting go of what was worst.

Go to the cemetery tomorrow and bow before your ancestors. Forgive their failures. Let them go, so their failures stop with them. But hold on to their virtues, so they continue. In doing both of those things, in letting go and in holding on, you will be honoring your ancestors, and you will be blessed.