Moving Forward
Joshua 3:7-17
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

If you haven't yet come across it, I would recommend the podcast *All There Is with Anderson Cooper*. The description of the podcast reads this way, "Grief can feel so lonely but talking about it and listening to others share their experiences helps. In…this award-winning podcast, Anderson Cooper continues his deeply personal exploration of grief in all its complexities. In moving and honest discussions, he learns from others who have faced life-altering losses" (All There Is with Anderson Cooper Podcast | Listen on Amazon Music).

I find myself frequently listening to Anderson and his guests as they share their stories and experiences of grief, of loss, of living with loss. The most recent episode I listened to was Anderson's October 8th conversation with tech executive, philanthropist, and writer Sheryl Sandberg whose husband, Dave, died suddenly at the age of 47.

During this conversation, Sheryl talked about a concept she learned from a man named Joe Casper, whose son had died. That concept is co-destiny - the idea that when you do things in memory of a person who has died, you are not only continuing to live yourself, but you are fulfilling their destiny, and by doing so, you are helping them live on (Sheryl Sandberg On Finding Love and A Deeper Joy, After Loss, October 8, 2026 on *All There Is with Anderson Cooper*).

I feel that in today's scripture. In the book of Joshua, the story of movement from slavery to freedom, from wilderness to promise…we hear a story that began with Moses and continues with Joshua.

And did you hear the first verse in today's reading? "The Lord said to Joshua, 'This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses'" (Joshua 3:7, NRSVUE).

The reality is that Moses had led the people for a long time. Moses had been the one they followed *and* the one they resisted. Moses was the one they listened to *and* the one they challenged. Moses was the one who was understood to be called by God to this role. And even after 40 years, even when he was slowing down with age or maybe struggling to come up with fresh ideas, still it was likely that it was difficult for the people to imagine what moving forward without him would look like.

And if you know this story, you know that toward the end of the book of Deuteronomy, the book that comes just before Joshua in our Bibles, Moses hears from God that he won't be going with the people through this next transition. Instead, he will die on the edge of the wilderness and someone else - Joshua - will lead them.

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Now we can imagine all the feelings that Moses must have had. There was likely a part of him that was relieved, that was ready to step out of this role, even that was tired from the demands of this life. *And* there was likely also a part of him that was sad or upset by not being able to complete the journey upon which he had been leading the people for decades.

And in the midst of all the feelings that he must have had, Moses said farewell with gratitude for the opportunity he had been given, with hope for what would come next for the people, and with confidence in, and even blessing of, Joshua who would step into his shoes.

And again our reading began, "The Lord said to Joshua, 'This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses'" (Joshua 3:7, NRSVUE).

And so, even as grief accompanied them, the people moved forward, following what they understood as God's call, remaining faithful to the God to whom Moses had been faithful, creating space for Joshua to lead them.

Saying goodbye to people we love is difficult. We know that. We know that, whether those people are leaders who are important to us and our community, or whether those losses are more personal - losses of spouses, parents, grandparents, children, friends.

And grief is a sometimes unpredictable companion. There is not one right way to experience it. There is not one straight line of feelings that arise in its aftermath. There is not one timeline upon which it works. And often we discover that while its presence changes, grief is never really gone.

And, yet even with its companionship, we, too, move forward.

Again citing Anderson Cooper's conversation with Sheryl Sandberg, she told the story of going through Dave's things with Dave's mom and brother. Sheryl said, "We're cleaning out Dave's things, and [his mom is] standing there and doing it, and I am on the floor, hysterical, and I looked at her, I'm like, 'how are you okay?'

"'Paula, how are you doing this again? You did this for a husband, you're doing this for a son.' And she turned around…and she said, 'I am still alive.' She said Mel, her husband, died and Dave died, but, 'I am here and I am alive," and then she said, 'and you are, too'" (Sheryl Sandberg On Finding Love and A Deeper Joy, After Loss, October 8, 2026 on *All There Is with Anderson Cooper*).

And so we live, after loss, with the reality that even when someone we loved is no longer here, we are still alive.

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That reality can feel overwhelming to us and it can also be an invitation…an invitation to choose how we live with intention, an invitation to reflect on the best of who our loved ones were and continue their work in this world.

At funerals I often talk about legacy…similar to co-destiny…it is the way we keep our loved ones alive, it is the way we allow our aliveness to be purposeful, it is a way we remember their best with action and with care.

Today we have remembered three persons from this congregation. And we continue to remember them when we live the best of who they were.

When we till the ground and lift our voices together in song with others, we remember Rich.

When we approach people who might feel uncomfortable and make them feel welcome or when we use our skills to create something for another, we remember Darrell.

When we live from a position of compassion or approach the next generation with joyful laughter, we remember Mark.

Today we have remembered others, people from different places in our lives, people who mattered to us. And when we live the best of who they were, we keep them alive as well.

Today we celebrate those who have made a difference in our lives. And we remember that their impact is not finished. Rather they live on in us and with us as together we move forward. Amen.

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