

I have this children's book that I got years ago called Water Bugs and Dragonflies.

The purpose of the book is to try to explain death to children.

The gist of the book is that every once and a while, the water bugs notice that one of their own crawls up to the top of a thin reed, and then doesn't return.

One day, one of the water bugs asks another one to crawl up and then come back down and tell them what it's like up there.

The water bug agrees, he crawls to the top of the thin reed, out of the water, and then doesn't return.

He doesn't return because he has transformed into a dragonfly and he can't come back down into the water with the water bugs because the dragon fly can only land on top of the water.

The dragon fly knows that his water bug friends are still down there, and he loves them and misses them, he just can't be with them.

There's a barrier now.

In a similar way, we can explain to young children that when someone dies who has been close to us, they can no longer be with us in their physical body, but their presence is still with us.

Their spirit is with us, and we can be assured that they're watching over us and they still love us very much.

I believe that when someone dies, their presence is still with us, just in another shape or form.

Their spirit still abides with us, and we might even be able to feel them with us, just beyond our grasp.

I've heard people recount stories of the unmistakable presence of a deceased loved one in the room with them.

They knew they were there, they couldn't touch them, but they could talk to them, and felt comforted by their presence.

One friend told me that she had an experience in which she knew her grandfather's hands were on her shoulders.

She could physically feel it.

Maybe you have had a similar experience.

This is because when loved ones leave us, they don't really leave us, they simply transform.

Their energy still abides with us, their memories live on in us, we can still hear their voice, maybe feel their touch, even catch a whiff of their smell.

When loved ones pass away, they become our ancestors.

After death, they serve a new purpose, which is to help guide us through this life.

The Mexican holiday of Día de los Muertos is about honoring the ancestors and helping them in their spiritual journeys.

The 3-day celebration, held each October, is done to invite the departed spirits back for a visit.

Mexicans prepare the favorite foods and beverages of their loved ones, and visit their graves, bringing the food and drink and other possessions as gifts.

They'll also make altars in their homes for their loved ones that are adorned with pictures and candles.

They're trying to entice their ancestor to accept their invitation and to come back and visit the human realm.

In today's story, we heard about some long-deceased ancestors who also come back to the human realm.

This doesn't take place in Mexico, far from it.

Today's story occurs on top of a mountain, Mount Tabor in modern-day Israel.

Jesus takes his disciples, Peter, John and James with him to the mountain.

Jesus' clothes turn a dazzling white, and all of a sudden, two other men appear with him, Moses and Elijah.

Now, lest we think that the disciples were not able to see Moses and Elijah, the text clearly tells us that the two men appeared in glory and the disciples saw them speaking with Jesus about his upcoming death.

The story tells us that even though Peter and James and John were weighed down with sleep, or, in other words, really tired, they had stayed awake.

This was no dream, they saw Jesus in his glory and the two men standing with him.

It might have been like when we've felt the presence of someone and it was so close, so real, it made the hair stand up on the back of our necks, like when my friend felt her grandfather's hands on her shoulders.

I bet Peter, James and John could feel their presence so acutely, as if Moses and Elijah were literally standing right in front of them.

These two figures were Jesus' ancestors.

They were there because Jesus was trying to communicate to his disciples the importance of who he was.

He wasn't just another teacher, another rabbi.

He was the culmination of what had been prophesied in the Hebrew Bible.

Moses represented the law, as we know God gave him the 10 Commandments, and Elijah represented the prophets, and Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and of all the great prophecies.

Jesus could not have existed in a vacuum.

Part of what made him so significant was those who came before him.

The prophets and teachers and elders and leaders who were written about in the Hebrew Bible who shaped their faith tradition, they were the central characters in the sacred Jewish stories, they helped the Israelites understand how to connect with God.

Without them, Judaism wouldn't have existed and Jesus, he may have existed as a person, but he wouldn't have been able to exist as the Messiah for us.

His ancestors gave him his significance.

In the same way, our ancestors remind us that we are more than what meets the eye.

We're more than what has happened to us in this life.

We are the culmination of generations of people who lead up to our existence, and likewise, we will join the ranks of the ancestors for those who come after us.

We are shaped by the values of those who came before us.

Those who loved us, who believed in us, are often the sacred people who were able to see the best in us even when we couldn't see it in ourselves.

If you're not close with your biological family, your ancestors might be close friends, teachers or mentors who have passed.

We all have at least someone who has helped to shape our character and identity who is no longer with us.

Or maybe you never knew that person directly.

I have been told that I was deeply loved by someone who passed when I was very young, so I don't remember knowing her.

But I believe her spirit is still with me, she's still watching over me.

I recently saw a poster that said, "*Remember, your grandmother's prayers are still protecting you.*"

It might not be your grandmother, but whoever that ancestor is, they're still protecting you.

Now, while they're on the mountain, God tells the three disciples, "*This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!*" (Luke 9:35)

God was working with Jesus and Moses and Elijah to impart to the disciples the significance of who Jesus was, as his life was nearing its end.

We, too, should listen to the wisdom of those who came before us.

Maybe you hear that voice in the form of a prayer or advice when you're in a certain situation and you know what your ancestor would tell you to do.

Maybe you hear them by listening to that voice within yourself that tells you that you are capable of more than you think.

This text reminds us that nobody, not even Jesus, can shine alone.

We need each other, and we need those who came before us, just as the ones who will come after us will need us.

Our ancestors survived struggle and misfortune and challenges, and they remind us that we can, too.

Moses overcame struggle, as did Elijah, and Jesus could too.

But he couldn't have done it alone.

Some Africans call Jesus the Great Ancestor.

As Christians, we are all descendants of him, each generation building on the one that came before.

Jesus left such an indelible mark on humanity that his legacy has lasted for thousands of years.

Just like he only existed in body for a finite amount of time, so do we.

We aren't here permanently, we aren't supposed to be.

But we do have a job to do while we are here, in this mortal life, which is to live into the faith of our forbearers so that we leave a strong legacy for our descendants.

Because one day it will be us existing in the spiritual realm, abiding with our loved ones on Earth.

So let us do all that we can to shower people with the love and affirmation they deserve, so that when we pass, they'll be able to feel our hands on their shoulders.

Amen.