

John 11:17-27
November 1, 2009 All Saints Day

Hampton Baptist
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“A Belief in Hope”

Like all of us, Jesus enjoyed the acquaintances of many and the true friendship of a few. Counted among those closest to him were three siblings, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and we enter the New Testament Lesson after Lazarus had already been dead for four days. The grieving sisters had been enveloped in darkness for more than half-a-week, wondering when their friend would come. Martha had *longed* to see Jesus *long* before she saw him that day. She believed in his power and the potency of his presence. She knew in her head that Jesus could perform miracles; she had undoubtedly witnessed numerous accounts with her own eyes. She evidenced a blind trust by confirming her belief that if only Jesus had been present, then her brother would not have died; this substantiated her belief that God would deliver whatever Jesus asked.

This hope extends to all who gather today. While we cannot predict economic downturns or facility failures or systems paralyzes, and we cannot with any certainty predict our longevity nor the life-spans of our loved ones, we can with full confidence, like Martha, believe that God will deliver when we are in the most dire of circumstances or the greatest pangs of grief. This blind trust fosters hope even when circumstances are grave.

We gather today to recall those of our congregation who are now “absent from the body but are present in the Lord,” to quote the Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Church at Corinth. We trust in the glorious promise that those who have left us now find themselves in God’s presence. We grieve not for them, but for ourselves. While *they* no longer feel pain, *we* continue with the aches of not hearing their voices and laughter, or expecting their footsteps coming down the hall, or sitting across the table from them for a meal or being able to pick up the phone to tell them the latest news. We grieve for ourselves.

With confidence Martha told Jesus that she knew her brother would rise again at the last day. To this comment, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives, believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?”

Jesus was speaking to Martha, who like many today, had an aching heart and faced the despair of loneliness and grief. Across this abyss of hurt and pain, Jesus’ words became a bridge to the land of hope and promise. While Jesus’ question brought a definitive response from Martha, her understanding and belief were dim compared to the light of resurrection power. Perhaps she believed with all her might and with all her being in the future, in the after-life, because of the power she had already witnessed in her friend Jesus Christ. So when asked if she believed, she definitively responded, “Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One who was promised to come into the world.” That belief in hope indicated her comprehension that Jesus was who he said he was and would do what he said he would do.

As we remember those loved ones who have preceded us in death the words of the text come to us, “Jesus is resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Jesus, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives, believing in Jesus does not ultimately die at all. Do we believe this?”

A God who can overcome death can overcome any hardship. A belief in Jesus is a belief in hope.