



Ya Gotta Believe!



A Sermon By
The Rev. Andrew W. Walter

All Saints' Sunday
November 1, 2015

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon is available at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2015-11-01-AWW.mp3>.

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Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9

John 11:32-44

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The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God

Luke 15:11

*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping,
he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.*

John 11:33

I have been Rector here at Grace Church for a while now, and the time has finally come to let you in on a family secret: I married a Mets fan. Not some Johnny-come-lately, the Mets are in the World Series, fair weather fan, but a dyed in the wool, bleeds blue and orange Mets fan.

I realize some of you already know this, and some of you may be disappointed by this because you like another team. I also know some of you even like the Nationals, but whatever team you like, or even if you do not like baseball, it is hard to begrudge Mets fans a little happiness because being a Mets fan is tough. First, you have to live in the shadow of that other baseball team from New York, and second, the Mets stink. They are really not very good. My wife and I have been married forever, and in all the time we have known each other, the Mets have only had three good seasons. The Mets are so bad (how bad are they?) there is even a facebook page called "It hurts being a Mets fan," and it has over 10,000 likes.

But, as we all know, real fans stick with their team. They hang in there through the lean years, living through the struggles, hearts breaking at the losses, forgiving all the failures, and real fans are always optimistic and hopeful. They see the best in their team. They watch players grow and develop. They recognize potential and possibility. And, they bask in each victory, no matter how small that victory might be.

Every spring, as baseball season gets underway, my wife joins the chorus of Mets fans chanting the team slogan: Ya Gotta Believe! Ya Gotta Believe! They say it again and again. For fifty years, they have been saying it: "This is our year! Ya Gotta Believe!" And, all because they believe in their team and they love their team.

Wouldn't you like to have fans like that? People who believe in you and love you like that?

Life is often like baseball season, long and challenging, with stretches when things go our way and we can do no wrong, followed by stints when we can't seem to catch a break. There are

periods of life when we struggle, sometimes because of the way we act and decisions we make, and other times, because of situations outside of our control. While we all know the thrill of victory, we have also felt the agony of defeat,¹ with disappointment and heartbreak and loss. It is all a part of life. That is just the way it is. Even Jesus knew the high's and low's of the human experience.

In our Gospel story this morning, Jesus was way off in the country, on the other side of the Jordan River, when he received word that his friend Lazarus was sick. It took Jesus several days to reach the town of Bethany where Lazarus lived, and by the time he got there, it was already too late. His friend Lazarus was dead, and the funeral itself was over. Lazarus was one of those people that everyone knew and everyone loved so the whole town was grieving his death, especially his sisters Martha and Mary – they were inconsolable – and it was just too much for Jesus, the loss, the emotion.

The King James Version of the Bible describes the moment simply. It says, “Jesus wept;” but, those two words, the shortest sentence in the entire Bible, capture the haunting loneliness which Jesus felt; and, for those of us who have been where Jesus was, no more words are necessary.

When we experience a profound loss, or major disappointment, or a significant setback in life, sometimes all we want to do is lock yourself up in a room and do what Jesus did: weep. Even if we are surrounded by family and friends, it can still feel as though we are on our own, as if nobody knows what we are going through, so it is us against the world, and it is easy to think we are all alone. In really hard and difficult moments, the world can be a terrible lonely place.

But, today we remember we are never alone.

Today is All Saints Day, when we celebrate all the faithful Christians who have gone before us. This includes the well-known saints of God whose stories we read about in the Bible, but it also includes the most ordinary of regular people: saints with the same quirks and weaknesses and idiosyncrasies as you and me; saints who were not perfect, by any stretch of the imagination, but did the best they could in the face of challenges and unfair circumstances, wins and losses, sorrow and joy. These saints include our parents and grandparents, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, people we know and people we don't know.

The Bible tells us they are in the hands of God, so while we no longer see them face to face, their souls remain in our midst, loving us and caring for us, inspiring us and guiding us. We are connected to them through Jesus, and just as nothing can separate us from the love of God, nothing can separate us from the saints of God. They are always nearby, no farther than the thoughts of our heart, and so whatever we are going through, whatever we are experiencing, the saints are there, too, supporting us and praying for us, so, we are never, ever, alone.

¹ ABC's *Wide World of Sports*.

Many years ago, I went over to my mother's house one Saturday morning to have breakfast with her. When I rang the doorbell, there was no answer, which seemed kind of strange because she knew I was coming. I rang the doorbell again, but when there was still no answer, I started to get worried. I pounded on the door; and, I pounded on the door; and, then ran around the house looking in the windows. As I passed by her bedroom, I couldn't see anything, but I heard a faint sound. "Mom?!"

"I'm on the floor," she responded, her voice barely audible. "I can't get up."

I called 911, and we broke down the front door.

My mother had gotten up during the middle of night and fallen. She had been on the floor for hours. She was dehydrated and not doing well. She spent days in the ICU, and at times, it was not clear she would live.

I remember standing by her bedside and praying, praying as hard as I could, praying with all my might, praying to my father. My father died years before, but while he was alive, he always took care of us. Standing by my mom's hospital bed, I needed him to take care of us again. I needed his help and support; and, so I prayed and prayed; and, I felt better. I felt peace.

We are surrounded by a stadium full of fans, and from their seats high in the stands of heaven, they cheer for us and encourage us, giving us strength to meet whatever comes our way. They revel in our victories, and they mourn over our losses. They stick with us through every season, and they are always there. Come rain or shine, they are there, and if you listen, you can hear them chanting: Ya Gotta Believe! Ya Gotta Believe! Ya Gotta Believe! Because they do. They believe in us and love us, like the God who connects us all.

Amen.