

Believe and See the Glory of God!

By Bishop Héctor A. Burgos Núñez

Scripture Passage: John 11:1-45

¡Buenos días, Upper New York!

I am Héctor Burgos Núñez,
resident bishop of the Susquehanna and
Upper New York Episcopal area,
and it is my joy to welcome everyone—clergy and laity alike—
to the OnCenter here in Syracuse (first time for me here).
It is so good to see your faces,
hear your voice,
and feel your spirits
as we are gathering for our 2025 Annual Conference session.

(SHORT PAUSE)

Do something for me:

Turn to those at your table, look around you, and tell them,

“I am so glad you are here!”

Come on now—don’t be shy!

Get off those chairs, reach out to someone with the extravagant love and peace of Christ,
and tell them:

“I am so glad you are here!”

(PAUSE to allow time for interaction – camera highlights the congregation)

Family of God, we are so glad you are all here!

(PAUSE)

Annual Conference is not an ordinary meeting,
and we are no ordinary fellowship,

We are the people called

United Methodists in Upper New York.

Brought together in the power of the Holy Spirit

To bear witness to God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

Brought together to embody God’s vision

of the beloved community,
where all people are seen, welcomed, and embraced.
To celebrate the rich diversity among us
as a gift from God.
And, to love boldly, to serve joyfully,
and lead courageously,
transforming lives, communities,
and the world through the mighty healing
and liberating love of Jesus Christ.

Can I get an Amen?

(PAUSE)

This year, we gather under the theme:
BELIEVE – and see the glory of God!
Rooted in John 11:1-45.

This passage is not just about a miraculous resurrection.
It is a call from the Spirit to nurture the kind of faith
that opens our spiritual vision
so that we can see, claim, live,
and share the glory of God
in our everyday lives and ministries.

(PAUSE)

United Methodists of Upper New York,
in this season,
God is inviting us to BELIEVE and SEE.
God wants to expand our spiritual vision,
so that we can see, experience,
and share God's glory in our communities!
(SMALL PAUSE)

But let's be honest.
Believing is not always easy.
Martha and Mary
Filled with grief, they struggled
to reconcile their sorrow with their faith.

Their brother was dead,
And Jesus had delayed his coming.
Why did He wait?
Why did He not prevent their suffering?

In our discipleship and ministries,
We often face challenges (and have as of late, right?)
Declining attendance.
Struggling communities.
Socio-political chaos.
Personal doubt and struggles.
And, like Martha and Mary,
We ask similar questions.

But through this story,
Jesus is calling us to
lean into our faith!
Jesus is calling us
Beyond doubt,
beyond despair,
beyond defeat,
into a deeper trust,
where our believing unveils God's glory
in ways we could never predict.
Ways that open our eyes
to see that God is still moving,
still working,
still bringing life
Where there seems to be none.

(PAUSE)

**In this season, God is calling us
to step forward even when the path is uncertain.**

Martha believed in resurrection.
Yet, she hesitated when Jesus asked
for the stone to be rolled away.

How often do we do the same?

We claim belief,
But when action is required, we falter.

The raising of Lazarus, friends,
was not just an isolated event.
It is an invitation
to trust,
to believe,
to put our faith into action!
Jesus is asking us today,
just as He asked Martha:
*“Did I not tell you that if you believe,
you will see the glory of God?”*
Church, do you believe this?

(PAUSE)

We are standing before the tombs of our time!

(SHORT PAUSE)

Let me say that again:
CHURCH, we are standing before the tombs of our time!
Tombs that threaten our communities,
our ministries, and our witness to the world.

- The tomb of decline
as many churches face shrinking resources
and growing uncertainty.
- The tomb of exhaustion,
as many leaders wrestle with doubt,
frustration, and burnout.
- The tomb of isolation,
as loneliness, division, and hopelessness
grip our neighborhoods.
- The tomb of injustice,
as racism, exclusion,
white supremacy, Christian nationalism,
and inequity distort God’s vision for creation.
- The tomb of oppression,
as the most vulnerable are ignored,
while power is abused

and the rich are prioritized over the poor,
the elderly, those with disabilities,
the trans community,
people of color, and immigrants – just to name a few.

We are standing before the tombs of our time!

(PAUSE)

SO, as we stand before these tombs,

What are we going to do?

What are we going to do when action is required?

Now more than ever, as followers of Jesus Christ,
as servant leaders in Christ's church,

as United Methodists,

our faith, must move beyond passive belief,

And become a living action.

An embodiment of the Risen Christ!

Church, as we stand before these tombs,
what will we do?

I will tell you what we will do!

We believe.

We step forward.

We trust that God's unlimited power
will move in our lives

and through our ministries,

bringing new life through the healing,

AND liberating love of Jesus Christ!

Can I get an Amen?

In our *churches* and *ministries*,

We must stop mourning decline,

Holding on to what it is,

And clinging to nostalgia,

AND instead, go about living the gospel

And embodying God's love

with our neighbors in all places.

What will we do?

We innovate.

We experiment.
We take risks for the sake of the gospel,
We create new models of discipleship.
We do not fear resource shortages
we trust in God's provision
and seek new ways to fund the mission and serve.
SO THAT,
we grow and form disciples of Jesus Christ.
We develop Christ-like servant leaders.
We journey in solidarity with the poor
and the most vulnerable,
AND we seek the health and wellbeing
of all people and creation.

In our *leadership*,

What will we do?

We step forward in faith
Believing
Trusting the One who called us.
We care for ourselves and for one another,
knowing that exhaustion is not failure,
but a call for renewal.
We build community.
We embrace collaboration,
knowing that the Holy Spirit moves in community,
not in isolation, and
that we are stronger TOGETHER.
We hold each other accountable
In love and with grace.
We preach with conviction,
boldly proclaiming that through Christ,
God's power still moves stones
bringing hope and new life.

In our *communities*,

we embody Christ's love and hope.
We refuse to accept division
and loneliness as inevitable.
We preach God's grace in Jesus

and invite people to embrace God's boundless love
through active discipleship.

We build bridges.

We reconcile relationships.

We offer a place to belong.

We reject systems that oppress,
lifting the poor, defending the marginalized,
and advocating for justice.

We speak God's truth to power,
refusing to let the idols of this era
distort Christ's call to love all people
without distinctions or favoritism.

In the *world*,

What will we do?

we are BOLD in faith!

Racism, white supremacy,
and Christian nationalism
are not of God.

So, we dismantle them with truth and love.

Abusive authoritative leadership,
greed, and exploitation
contradict the Gospel.

So, we lead with compassion and justice,
prioritizing the vulnerable above the powerful,
just like Jesus did.

And in every act of love, service,
and prophetic witness:
we proclaim resurrection,
not as distant hope,
but as a present reality,
that, thanks to Jesus Christ,
is available today to all
who call on the name of the Lord,
and extends into eternity. Alleluia!

(PAUSE)

Church: resurrection,

new life,
is possible.
In our lives,
in our servant leadership,
And, in our communities.
SO, open your eyes
And see the glory of God!
Resurrection is happening.
Resurrection is OURS,
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
through Jesus Christ our Lord!
Resurrection is OURS
So, let's believe it, claim it, live it,
And share it with as many people as possible.

Alleluia

(PAUSE)

God did not leave Lazarus in the tomb.
And God will not leave us in the tombs of our times!
But faith requires deep trust and obedience.
It requires action.
It requires rolling away the stones
Even BEFORE we see the miracles!

United Methodists of Upper New York
Let's roll away the tombstones.
Let's shed grave clothes.
Let's believe and see what God can do!
Let's seek the kind of faith
that manifests God's power.
That transforms lives and communities.
That brings new life
through the boundless love of Jesus Christ!

We do not retreat.
We do not despair.
We do not accept tombs as permanent.
We believe,
We believe,

We believe,
AND, because Christ lives,
WE WILL SEE THE GLORY OF GOD!

Amen

If this is your faith and hope in Christ,
Get off those chairs,
And give God your praise!

All praise and honor be
To our Savior and Friend
Jesus Christ!

Let's join our spirit in prayer.

Holy and Merciful God,
We gather before You,
humbled and expectant,
Longing to see, to experience,
and to share Your glory.

You have called us to believe,
Not merely to hold faith in words,
but to embody it in action.
To step forward in confidence,
even when the path is uncertain.
To move from religion to relationship,
from passive expectation to willingness
to give of ourselves in love and service.

Yet (camera feed on the congregation)
Lord, we confess
There are times we hesitate,
Times when doubt clouds our vision,
When fear paralyzes our movement,
When we fail to roll away the stone.
We confess that we have been distracted,
By decline,

By exhaustion,
By division.
We have struggled to see Your presence
in the midst of hardship,
Questioning Your timing,
questioning Your ways.

Forgive us, O God.
Reclaim our hearts!
Draw us beyond comfort and complacency,
Renew our vision,
Strengthen our faith,
That we may rise, as true believers,
moved by Your Spirit,
compelled to love,
courageous in service.

Empower us to step forward,
To proclaim and embody Your love,
To stand boldly in the face of injustice,
To proclaim life where the world sees death.

In our churches,
restore a hunger for Your presence.
In our leadership,
rekindle a fire for truth and justice.
In our communities,
let us be a beacon of healing and hope.
In our world,
may our witness reflect the mercy,
compassion,
and love of Christ.

And so, we stand before
the tombs of our time,
Proclaiming that through Christ,
stones are still being moved,
New life is still rising,
And Your glory is still being revealed!

We believe, O Lord
So, help our unbelief.
Transform our faith from passive words
into living action.
Let Your resurrection power move among us,
That we may live and lead as faithful servants,
Through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

Amen