

2025-04-24 Yolanda Hamm – Funeral Message

We gather here today to remember Yolanda Hamm and give thanks to our God for the gift of her life.

I've known Yolanda for quite some time – since Daniel and Esther were small children.

Yolanda was a woman of deep faith and deep commitment to her Lord Jesus.

She really wanted to please Jesus in everything.

She had a loving way about her, always willing to help others.

She was VERY conscientious.

I mean, she really wanted to do what was right, what honored God, what would demonstrate that she really intended to serve Jesus in everything.

I don't mean to say she was perfect – she would never say that about herself.

There were times she would call me or meet with me, as her pastor, about various things going on in her life. And I'm not going to break any confidence with her, of course.

But I will say that one thing she occasionally struggled with just a bit, and this indicates how serious she was about her faith, was whether or not this, that, or the other thing in her life were "right" in God's sight.

I don't mean to say that she was a worrier.

But I do mean to say that she was concerned that whatever decision she made would honor God, or she might wonder if an action she had taken was not the best.

It could cause her some unrest – a lack of peace in her mind – on occasion.

A number of times our interactions led to us remembering that her faith was not in her own goodness, but in Jesus and his love for her.

And, of course, just as we all sometimes need to be reminded of things we already know – so it would be with her.

She would focus on Jesus, and be at peace.

And out of that peace with Jesus she led a beautiful life of blessing to many, many people. We who are gathered here today experienced this.

I'm grateful that she labored with us at Long Beach Friends.

She was, to us, a gift from God.

Now, I think I should transition to speaking a bit more generally about what brings us together today.

Death brings to us a separation from the one who has died.

We don't like separation – certainly not from one that we love!

I remember my children, and then my grandchildren being very upset at separation. You've probably seen it, too. Little children cry when someone they love leaves for some reason. They don't understand that the separation is temporary. It can be very emotional to leave a little one who is crying behind, right? Even though we know we will return and see them again not so long from now. And eventually children learn how things work and stop crying every time we leave. We will be back, and they know.

When someone dies, there is a separation. Those who love that person do not like the separation. We grieve at the separation – and rightfully so! Today, I want us to be clear on something I'm confident Yolanda would want us to know about our separation from her.

And so, I'd like to connect our time today to an occasion in Jesus' life. Jesus was good friends with a man named Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. John, in the Gospel he wrote, tells about when Lazarus first died. There is much to this story that we do not have time to get into today. It's from the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John; I recommend you read it yourself.

The context for the part of the story I think we should focus on today is that Lazarus became sick; his sisters Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus; but Jesus did not get to them until after Lazarus had passed away. Eventually he comes near to their village.

John 11:20-27

²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ *“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”*

Many of you will know this story, and remember that after this Jesus called Lazarus out of his tomb and restored him to life.

Jesus demonstrated his power over death by raising Lazarus.

And of course, just last Sunday, we celebrated Easter. What’s that about?

That’s our celebration of Jesus’ ultimate victory over death when He walked out of the tomb where he was laid after dying on the cross to save those who trust Him.

Later, Jesus, in a vision after his resurrection explained it to John: He holds the keys to death and what comes after death. The power for life is in his hands!

John 3.16

¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Back to Mary and Martha – they were quite sad when their brother Lazarus died.

I think it is safe to say that they were even upset with Jesus because he had not come quickly enough to stop Lazarus’ illness from killing him.

In this particular case, Jesus.... How shall I describe it?

Jesus “reversed” Lazarus death. He brought him back to life so that his power over life and death was on display for people to see – the “glory of God”, is how Jesus described what people saw that day when He raised Lazarus from death!

However, so far as we know, sometime later – maybe decades later, even after Jesus called him out of that tomb, Lazarus passed away, and so did Mary and Martha.

So, what was it that Jesus said to Martha, again?

“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

I remember hearing this story read to me when I was very young.

I recall thinking, in that simple way of a child... What a minute. “Never die?” Really?

Doesn’t every human being eventually die?

Lazarus isn't around today! I can't visit him, or even see him on TV.
What does Jesus mean that those who believe in him will never die?

Consider with me, for a moment, something we do not like to consider.
What is death?

Our physical body ceases to function, grows still and then cold.
There is separation from those who remain alive in this world.
So what did Jesus mean.... Never die?

What is helpful is for us to understand that there are two perspectives to consider.
One is the perspective of the person who... "dies".

What we believe, as followers of Jesus, is that the person whose body ceases to function passes into the presence of Jesus – not nothingness, not sleep, but a different sort of existence in which they are present with Jesus, with God, and awaiting the resurrection of the body when Jesus comes again and heaven and earth are remade.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul spoke about this in his letter to the church in Philippi.
Paul was considering if the end of his life in this world had come – or maybe not yet.

Philippians 1.21-24

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

You see how Paul thinks about this?

He's not thinking about life vs. death exactly.

He's thinking to continue his God-given work in this world or move on to a different sort of life in which he leaves this world and is present with Jesus.

And which does Paul say is better?

He says it is better – for him – to be with Jesus – by far!

And then he says it is better for the people in the church in Philippi for him to continue with them as they grow in their faith.

I heard Dallas Willard speak about this – what he imagined it would be like for a follower of Jesus who passes into this different kind of life.

He thought maybe it might take a believer a few minutes to realize that they were no longer “alive” in this world – that there had been a change – and then to realize that they were in the presence of Jesus.

Of course, from the other perspective, I mean for those left behind, the person has “died”.

Paul wants Christians to understand that this is not the end of existence, so he called it “falling asleep” and everyone knew he wasn’t talking about just normal sleep.

We have come to use words like “passed on” for much the same reason.

We will say that Yolanda has passed on to be with Jesus. **And we mean it.**

She’s not “dead” in any sense except that her old body has ceased to function and she is separated from us.

But she is also present with Jesus awaiting a new body in resurrection to the completeness of life that God intended humans to have in the beginning.

This is why Paul wrote these words in his letter to the believers in Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 4.13

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

We have hope...

John 3.16-17

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

That’s the good news that I know Yolanda would want us to hear today.

God loves her, God loves you, and even me so much that he sent his one and only Son Jesus so that we could put our trust in Him and gain life that does not end. God did not send Jesus to condemn, but to save – to save through what He did and does. This was and is good news for Yolanda. It is good news for you and for me. Put your trust in Jesus. Decide to follow Him, if you have not already. He is a good guide – a good shepherd – that’s the word he used. Speaking as the good shepherd, he said (**John 10.27-28**)

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

So today, we grieve the separation from Yolanda as she passes from this life. But we grieve knowing that this separation is not permanent as we trust in Jesus, the good shepherd sent by God who guides us on the way to life that does not end.

I want to say now what I believe Yolanda would want me to say at this time. Jesus speaks to each of us like he spoke to Martha. He says: *“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*
....She does!

Dear Lord, thank you that you love us and sent your Son Jesus to save us, to show us the way to life. Thank you for the gift of Yolanda’s life of faithfulness and love. We ask that by your grace we might imitate her example of following you. We trust you with our sister and for what is still to come, looking forward to the completion of all things when we will see her again. Amen.