

Dr. John Trent tells about a wedding video he once saw. The video was shot from the back of the church looking up the aisle toward the bride and groom. Because of the camera angle, you could see several members of the congregation. Suddenly, during the vows, a man jumped up from his pew and yelled, "**Yes, Yes, Yes!**" as he pumped his fist. Then he froze and slid down into his seat--and sheepishly took off his headphones. It turned out it was the beginning of the MSU Basketball Season, and his favorite team had just scored. Too bad the season didn't happen in the same Cheer!!

Easter is a day for Christians to pump their fists in the air (3) times and say, "Yes, Yes, Yes." **Yes is what Easter is about. EASTER IS God's yes to humanity, his "YES" that he won you and me that Gift of Eternal Life.**

EASTER IS God's yes to Jesus and all Jesus taught us about the meaning of life. EASTER IS God's yes to the victory of life over death, love over hate, faith over fear, hope over despair. EASTER IS GOD'S YES to our WORST DAY, TO ALL OUR TROUBLES, THAT IF WE ARE WILLING TO GIVE God a chance to help . . .and wait for three days, somehow we know everything is going to be all right."

Everything about Easter says, "Yes, Yes, Yes."

Recently I read a hilarious story about a six-year-old boy named David who was taking a walk with his grandmother. They decided to detour through the local graveyard. Stopping to read the tombstones, Grandma explained that the first date on the tombstones was the day the person was born and the second date was the day the person died. "**Why do some tombstones only have one date?**" little David asked. "**Because those people haven't died yet!**" she said. David was obviously stunned by his grandmother's explanation because, that night, he couldn't stop talking about their journey in the graveyard. "**Mom, he said with wide eyes, "some of the people buried there in the cemetery aren't even dead yet!"**"

Leave it to a six-year-old to put a different twist on things. But Easter puts the grandest twist to the story of all. Easter says that the people who are buried there who are in Christ are not dead at all. They've simply exchanged a worn out or hopelessly damaged physical body for a new spiritual body that will last for all eternity. **What is our response to this but, YES!!**

You know the basic story. The details vary according to the Gospel you are reading. These are eyewitness testimonies passed along by word-of-mouth before they were written down. Different people remembered the story in different ways. But the gist of it all is that early on Sunday morning after Jesus' crucifixion some of the women who loved Jesus went to the tomb where his body lay, and they found the large stone guarding the entrance to the tomb rolled away. His body was gone. Later, the risen Christ appeared to his followers on many occasions, beginning with Mary Magdalene at the tomb, then James & John, and then the Apostle Peter as described in the book of Acts:

"We are witnesses of everything he did . . . They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day . . . He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:39-43, NIV) **Let's look for a few moments at Peter's words as we reflect on some of the ways Easter is God's "Yes" to humanity.**

First of all, EASTER IS AN ACT OF GOD. God raised Jesus from the dead, says the Apostle Peter. Easter is an act of God. We benefit from Easter, but we did nothing to bring it about.

It always amuses me to hear natural disasters described as acts of God--floods, hurricanes, all kinds of pestilence. Sometimes this is even the language that appears in legal contracts. ***"This insurance policy protects you against floods and other acts of God."*** Friends, these are acts of nature; they are not acts of God. You surely realize that. When the atmosphere in the Atlantic gets agitated and the temperature of the water below is just right, those natural conditions--under just the right circumstances--may cause a hurricane. This hurricane is an act of nature, not an act of God. **When people who have the love of Jesus in their hearts open their homes to hurricane victims, then that is an act of God.**

EASTER IS THE ULTIMATE ACT OF GOD!! *God raised Jesus from the dead. No human being can achieve immortality on their own. Many people have tried. BUT IT CANNOT BE DONE.*

There is only one way that a person who is DEAD CAN COME BACK TO LIFE... BY AN ACT OF GOD!!

Pastor Craig Barnes compares our human struggle to that of a person pushing against a huge stone--a stone like the one that blocked the entrance to Christ's tomb. He writes that we have all been pushing against something for a long time. And we push hard. "Maybe we've been pushing against a supervisor who is hard to satisfy, or against the threat of having our job downsized. Or maybe we're pushing against a marriage that seems destined for the ditch. Or maybe pushing against chronic pain, against depression, against loneliness and grief, or against some other obstacle that is between us and our dreams. Lately, we've all been pushing against the anxiety that terrorists will strike again." We work so hard to save our lives. We push and push and push, and in the end, Barnes says, "in one of the worst ironies of life," it seems all that waits on the other side is death.

But then we come into this room on Easter Sunday morning and we realize that the stone that we have been pushing against has been rolled away--THE STONE OF OUR MORTALITY, the stone of our inadequacy, the stone of our impurity. **God has given us His divine "Yes!"** and suddenly we have a new picture of our lives. That supervisor will not get the best of us, the loss of a job will not destroy us; neither will the loss of a marriage, the loss of a dream or even our failing health. ***These tragedies that come to us all do not have the power to destroy us because, in Easter, God has given us His "Yes!" In Easter God says to us there is nothing in this world or the next that will forever defeat one of God's children. WHY? Because Easter is an act of God.***

EASTER IS ALSO AN ACT OF GRACE. *Easter says God accepts us as we are, not because of anything we've done, but because of what Christ has done.*

PETER TELLS US IN THE READING OF ACTS...that ***"Christ's death and resurrection are linked to the forgiveness of sins. " . . . God appointed [Jesus] as judge of the living and the dead,"*** Peter declares. ***"All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*** **YES, EASTER IS AN ACT OF GRACE!!** *We did not deserve to be delivered from the power of the grave. We are sinners. We are imperfect, we are flawed. But still God loves us and invites us into His eternal house.*

In April 1995, Edye Smith lost her two small sons, Chase and Colton, in the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, two men with a deep hatred for the American government, set off a truck bomb that destroyed the front half of the federal building, including a day care center, and killed 169 people. Edye and her mother, Cathy Wilburn, were devastated by the loss of Chase and Colton. But hatred and suffering did not have the last word in this family's story. At the trial for Terry Nichols, Cathy Wilburn, grandmother of the murdered toddlers, noticed that Terry Nichols' mother and sister were alone in the courtroom, bearing the brunt of hatred from the victims and the public. **And as a Christian, a person who knows God's "Yes!" in her life,** Cathy Wilburn knew what her responsibility was. **So Cathy befriended Terry Nichol's mother and sister.** In fact, she opened her home to them, offering hospitality to two women she could easily have hated.

Such love, such forgiveness is possible in this world. It is possible because of what God has done in Christ. Easter

says that Christ has forgiven our sins--not because we deserve it, but simply out of his great love for us. **Easter is an act of God. Easter is an act of grace.**

BUT ALSO, EASTER CALLS YOU AND I TO A LIFE OF GRATEFUL LIVING.

And Easter is a summons to grateful living. We have God's favor. God has rolled away the stones of fear and of Trouble and of death. Now it is our turn to live as Easter people, to let our lives say, "yes!" to the people we meet each day. **EASTER IS REALIZING THAT EVEN IN OUR WORST DAYS, WE CAN FIND GOOD FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS IF WE ARE WILLING TO LOOK!!!**

It was a beautiful spring day, and a sense of peace stayed with me as I left the cathedral on Easter Monday morning. I paused for a moment on top of the steps leading to the avenue, now crowded with people rushing to their jobs.

Sitting in her usual place inside a small archway was the old flower lady. At her feet corsages and boutonnieres were parading on top of a spread-open newspaper. The flower lady was smiling, her wrinkled old face alive with some inner joy. I started down the stairs—then, on an impulse, turned and picked out a flower. As I put it in my lapel, I said, "You look happy this morning." **"Why not? Everything is good."**

She was dressed so shabbily and seemed so very old that her reply startled me. "You've been sitting here for many years now, haven't you? And always smiling. **You wear your troubles well."**

"You can't reach my age and not have troubles," she replied. **"Only it's like Jesus and Good Friday . . ."** She paused for a moment. **"Yes?" I prompted.**

"Well, when Jesus was crucified on Good Friday, that was the worst day for the whole world. And when I get troubles I remember that, and then I think of what happened only three days later—**EASTER and our LORD'S RISING FROM THE DEAD. So when I get troubles, I've learned to wait three days . . . somehow everything gets all right again.**"

Her words still follow me whenever I think I have troubles. All I have to do is...Give God a chance to help . . .**AND WAIT THREE DAYS.**

IT IS THROUGH "GRATEFUL LIVING" THAT AN "EASTER PERSON" NOT ONLY GETS THROUGH THE TROUBLES OF THEIR OWN LIFE, BUT SHARES WITH OTHERS HOW TO DO THAT AS WELL.

Eugene Smith was a minister who never sang much because he didn't have much of a voice and couldn't read music. But one year, his daughter persuaded him to sing THE "Hallelujah Chorus" along with the choir. When it came time for all the "Hallelujah's," he got carried away. He loved to sing those Hallelujahs and he was just about to sing a couple more when all of a sudden the choir and the organ stopped. He said that they stopped too soon. He said, *"Since that time I've been going around with a couple of Hallelujahs inside of me just waiting to get out."*

What a way to live and die--with Hallelujahs just waiting to get out. Like the excited Basketball fan yelling "Yes! Yes! Yes!" This is how life IS in the light of Easter. **Easter is an act of God, an act of grace, and a summons to EACH OF US TO LIVE A GRATEFUL LIFE.** The weight of life has lifted. Now let's live in HIS LIGHT and let's remember, to be patient, TO WAIT 3 DAYS, and celebrate the fact that death does not have the final say!!! **HAPPY EASTER!!!** And to that, may we as Easter people respond by saying, **YES, YES, YES!!! Amen.**