

## Easter 1 (2024)

Hyperboles – regardless if we are familiar with the term or not – are all around us. We hear and use them every day:

--“I so hungry I could eat a horse.”

--“This bag weighs a ton.”

Hyperboles are found in scripture as well:

**--“If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee,”** we hear Jesus say in Matthew 5:29.

**--“And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones,”** it is said of Solomon in 2 Chronicles 1:15.

Whether heard on the street or in scripture, we understand these as overstatements . . . exaggerated speech meant to get a point across.

But what about understatements?

They are the opposites of hyperboles and are likewise a common literary device.

An example would be to call the American Civil War in which over 600,000 died “the recent unpleasantness.”

Understatements can likewise be found in the Bible. Take, for example, the one found in this morning’s Gospel: **“Then were the disciples glad.”**

“Glad” seems hardly the word, but it is the word used in our English translation.

Let’s retrace where we have been over the last few weeks.

On what we now know as Palm Sunday, Jesus and the disciples entered Jerusalem amid

shouts of “hosannas”. He was given a king’s welcome. There was great joy.

But by Friday, those hosannas had gone silent and had been replaced by a new chant: “Crucify him, Crucify him.”

Then the unthinkable, as least from the standpoint of the disciples, happened. The One on whom they had set all their hope and had followed for three years was stripped, beaten, crucified, and His bruised and blooded body sealed in a tomb.

It looked as if He were a failed Messiah like so many that had come before Him.

How dejected and sad they must have felt. How dark the night. How they must have hurt.

Maybe you have been there. You know the feeling of darkness and absolute despair?

But then came the First Day of the Week – Sunday – and strange things began to happen. Tales began to circulate that the tomb where Jesus’ body had been placed was open and empty.

A few claimed to have seen Him alive, not as a resuscitated corpse or a spirit, but as someone that was more alive than ever.

What did it all mean?

Then came Sunday evening. The disciples and some other followers of Jesus were hunkered down in a locked room, most likely the same Upper Room where they had eaten the Passover meal with Jesus on Thursday.

They had every reason to be fearful. After all, if the Jewish authorities had come after their leader, what was to keep them from coming after them?

But at least they were together. Jesus' message at the Last Supper, the message to love and look after each other, must have gotten through and stuck. Hopefully it has stuck with us as well. If it hasn't, learn it and practice it.

Then, to their amazement, they discovered Jesus in their midst. How He got there no one could tell.

As the stone could not keep Him in the tomb, the bolt on the door could not keep Him out of the Upper Room . . . and the first word out of his mouth was a blessing: peace.

In view of what His followers had done following His arrest in the garden, most of them fleeing, this is remarkable indeed. No recriminations, just 'peace'.

Once I was hiking with a guy, and we got off the trail. As I was trying to figure out how to

right ourselves, I noticed him sprinting up a steep bank.

By the time I followed, he was nowhere to be seen.

As it turned out, I found my way back to the car first.

I don't remember exactly what I said when he finally showed up, but it wasn't 'peace'!

It was more like: "You rascal, why did you run off and leave me?"

Jesus was more gracious. Think about that the next time you want to give someone a piece of your mind.

But back to the story. As soon as Jesus appears, He shows them His hands and His side. No doubt His initial purpose was to say, "It's alright. It's really me. I'm not a ghost."

But these wounds meant more. They were signs of victory. They said: “I’ve gone through death and have come out the other side.”

Viewed theologically, they shouted, “mission accomplished!”

The mutiny in the Garden of Eden which had brought death and misery to the whole human race had been dealt with.

Remember what God said to the serpent in Genesis:

**“And I will put enmity between thee [the serpent] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”**

Which by interpretation means: The Serpent – Satan -- will inflict on the offspring of Eve much pain and sorrow.

But in the end, one Seed of woman will wield the fatal blow, the blow to the head. Jesus is that seed.

After Jesus showed them His hands and His side, we are told they were glad . . . again, an understatement if there ever was one.

Regardless, we should be glad as well. Why? Because the peace Jesus proclaimed that evening is our peace.

We don't have to let the mistakes of the past define and defeat us. What's true of Him is true of us. His victory is our victory.

What God the Father said at Jesus' baptism and more publicly still on Easter morning – **“This really is my beloved child”** – He says of each one of us.



Our baptism is the outward sign and pledge of our solidarity with Christ, that we have died and risen with Him.

There are other blessings that flows from Jesus' peace as well.

Misunderstood and falsely accused? We can stay calm, knowing that as God the Father vindicated His natural Son, so He will vindicate His adopted sons and daughters.

**“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?”** asks St. Paul in Romans 8. Then in the next breath, he answers his own question: **“It is God that justifieth.”**

More than that, the peace Jesus proclaimed that evening cancels out the fear of death. Remember Jesus' final words as hung on the cross? **“Into thy hands I commend my spirit.”**

Jesus died like a child falling asleep in the arms of His dad. The same can be our experience. It is because He lives.

There is no end to the peace that Jesus proclaimed that first Easter evening. Pray for just one thing . . . the peace of God . . . the peace that transcends human knowledge.

But today's Gospel does not end with Jesus' band of followers having a party, being glad. No, there is also a commission: **“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”**

Jesus' words here approximate those found at the end of Matthew's Gospel: **“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”**

It's the same today. You and I are called not only to joy unspeakable but to do and dare and to get out there in the fray of life.

There are other hurting souls who need Jesus' healing balm . . . people who need forgiveness and a new start. Who will tell them of Jesus' love, if we won't?

There is plenty of work to be done. We can work for a more just society in advance of His coming again.

We can stand with the downtrodden, those who have no helper.

We can lift up those who find themselves in the captivity of sin.

Are we up to the task? /// I think we are, not in our own strength, but in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

John does not give us an account of Pentecost (Luke does that in his Gospel and in Acts) but he does anticipate it when he says that Jesus breathed on them and said “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”

Jesus’ commission is given to us. The power of the Holy Spirit is ours.

Our calling as Easter people to be glad AND get busy. So, in closing:

Stay close to Jesus. Announce Him wherever you go. In a world of darkness and in a nation that is quickly severing itself from its Christian roots, be light.

Never forget our mission field is out beyond those front doors. That is neither a hyperbole nor an understatement. It is a direct command from the One who was dead but is alive forever more. /// Be glad and put your boots on!

