

Finding Easter Peace

It was the evening of the first Easter Sunday. Earlier that morning Peter and John had been to the tomb. They had discovered it was empty. They saw the strips of linen as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. It was a puzzling mystery. They knew something important had happened but they were not sure what. So they returned to the house where they were staying.

Mary stayed behind and while weeping she saw what appeared to be two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. Then immediately afterward she had an encounter with a stranger that in her grief she mistook for the gardener. Then he called her name and she discovered it wasn't the gardener at all. It was the Master risen from the grave. She ran back to tell Peter and John and the other disciples about her experience.

That evening the disciples were still processing all this. John tells us they were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders. That's interesting. We make a big deal about Easter Sunday morning, but Easter Sunday evening, the disciples were still cowering in fear. Obviously some questions still remained. Some doubts, fears and anxiety about what was next! Jesus had been put to death by his enemies. Would they now turn their hatred toward his followers? It was a reasonable question. So they were behind locked doors in fear and the last emotion they were experiencing was PEACE! Fear is quite debilitating. Fear keeps us from living our lives openly and joyfully.

On December 26, 1944, Japanese Intelligence Officer Hiroo Onoda, arrived on Lubang Island in the Philippines. Onoda's orders were simple. He and his men were to stop the enemy from securing the island. But before this Japanese military unit could destroy the airstrip and blow up the pier, American forces captured Lubang Island. Onoda and three other Japanese soldiers fled to the hills and hid. They were still hiding a year later. Onoda discovered a leaflet that read, "The war ended on August 15. Come down from the mountains!" Onoda refused. His orders were clear. Under no circumstances was he to surrender. Unable to reach his superiors, Onoda and his men burrowed deeper into the hills. Five years later, in 1949, one of the men surrendered to Filipino forces. A few years after that, an aircraft dropped letters and pictures from Onoda's family, urging him to come down. Still he refused. In 1954 members of a search party accidentally killed one of Onoda's men. Twenty years later local police mistakenly shot the last of his comrades. Now only Onoda remained, alone and forgotten, fighting a war he'd already lost. On March 9, 1974, thirty years after he first went into hiding, Onoda emerged from the jungle. He surrendered his uniform, sword, rifle, hand grenades, and 500 rounds of ammunition. He'd already surrendered thirty years of his life to isolation and fear.

What a tragic waste. But so it is with all who live as slaves to fear. Jesus means for his followers to have peace and **our** greatest need is peace. So, there they were, these followers of Jesus, behind those locked doors, speaking in whispers, confused, frightened, like sheep without a shepherd. "Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side." There was no longer any doubt. This was their Master, risen from the grave. And they were overjoyed.

If the Gospel had concluded on Easter Sunday morning with the empty tomb and the appearance of the stranger to Mary, there might be some question about the validity of the resurrection. It is Easter Sunday evening that removes all doubt and fears. There is no longer any question -He is alive, just as he said!

Isn't it time you quit running? The War is over – The Battle has been Won- We can come out of our fear and isolation and surrender ourselves at the nail pierced feet of Christ Jesus, who offers us eternal peace! Christ is the only source of true peace. Isn't it time you nestled yourself in the arms of your Heavenly Father? Jesus stood in the midst of his disciples and said, "Peace be with you!" Jesus wants his followers to have peace. Peace is our greatest need. Peace comes when we lean on the arms of our Heavenly Father. Jesus says to each of us this day: "Peace be with you!"