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Forgiveness Brings Peace

by The Rev. Mary Haas

Luke 24:36b-48: While the disciples were telling how they had seen Jesus risen from the dead, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

I. The Scene & the Resurrected Christ

The disciples were together, locked in worrying and wondering what was going to happen to them.

Their leader had been killed and if caught they could expect to be too. This is ample reason to be at the least nervous and at the most terrified.

Then all of a sudden Jesus is standing there. They knew He was dead yet here He was wishing them 'peace'. They were still terrified for they must have had questions, how did He get here, for everything was locked, was it some kind of trick? Was He really alive, had He somehow escaped death? Was what they saw a ghost? They had questions and no answers.

Even today if such a thing happened we would be just as terrified, ask just as many questions.

Jesus simply asked them why are you frightened and why do you doubt? For Jesus knew they didn't believe their own eyes.

Would we have believed? We'll never really know, but probably not, for how do you believe someone you know is dead is standing right in front of you.

Jesus understanding their doubts asked them to touch Him, to put their hands in His wounds. They did and even in their joy they were still disbelieving, still trying to make sense out of it all. Was He real? Was He alive?

Then Jesus asked for food they gave Him fish. He ate. Then Jesus told them of words He spoke when He was still among them and that everything that had been written about Him must be fulfilled.

Then He opened their minds to understand the scriptures. The disciples believed and learned from Jesus that repentance and forgiveness of sins was to be proclaimed in His name to all nations beginning with Jerusalem.

II. Peace, Love, Repentance and Forgiveness

The first thing Jesus had said when He appeared before His disciples was "peace be with you". This greeting is used today in churches world wide as parishioners greet each other and wish them Gods peace. In the days of Jesus, however it was as common as hello, hi, or good to see you are today.

From what I have read it meant the speaker was wishing you every good thing nothing bad just good things to come. Nor did it mean peace as opposed to war or conflict. God's peace is a special kind of peace it is certainly something you want for others and yourself to have. I believe it is a type of peace you only achieve through faith and living as God intended and through how much effort you put into loving God and loving your neighbor. If we work at loving as God wants us to do the chances of having peace of mind and heart are certainly greater than if we don't. Look at the commandments. Some tell us what we need to do to love God. The rest tell us what we need to do to show love for our fellow human beings. Jesus adds something to this here: repentance and forgiveness.

Your experience may be that you have never done anything you found difficult to repent for" If this is so you are fortunate.

To be truly sorry for something you may have done may not be as easy as one thinks. To be repentant and worthy of forgiveness one must be truly sorry for whatever transgression they have committed, to not want to repeat the offence and be willing to do whatever may be required to put things right. Not just give repentance lip service. You may never have done anything for which you feel you need to be sorry; that's great, but I have.

III. My Story

I'm not proud of it but it happened, when I was in high school I was often sent to school not only without having any breakfast but many times without having any food for two, three, even four days.

In time it got to the point where I would steal sandwiches or fruit from other students coat pockets. I knew it was wrong I knew I shouldn't do it but for four years of high school I did.

There came a time when I was truly repentant, but by then there was no way I could make restitution for what I had done. I could not ask forgiveness for what I had done from the people I had wronged for they were not available. I could only ask God for forgiveness.

It may be every bit as difficult to forgive as it is to ask for forgiveness. If someone calls you a name or in some way insults you, it may be easy for you to forgive them. Some things , however cut so deep, hurt so badly, to forgive becomes nearly impossible, yet not forgiving destroys the peace of God that you seek.

It is a special kind of peace which you receive only through God's grace and it may take years for it to manifest.

From the time I was eleven until I graduated from high school life was a living hell. Not only were my three sisters and I not fed three meals a day many days it was none and not because of poverty either. We were nailed in our bedrooms for days at a time not knowing when or if we would eat or drink.

We were beaten not spanked; there's a difference. We were beaten; one sister, more than once would pass out but the beating would not stop. The true stories I could tell you would shock you but what is important is I learned to hate and to hate hard almost to the point of murder.

Then I came here to live with my mom and joined Immanuel church. I learned things about God I never knew before. I learned of God's promise of forgiveness and that the hatred I felt was truly a sin. For years I searched for a way to be able to forgive. I pray that God would help me forgive her. I pray for her soul. Then just when I had gotten to a point where I thought the hatred was gone and I had truly forgiven Carol, a sister would call and bad memories would come flooding back or I would hear on the news of a child who was badly abused by someone. I would be right back to square one. The hatred was back

This went on for years as I struggled to truly forgive her for the way she had treated us. Forgiveness increased with some success, but also much failure.

Then a couple of years ago one of my sisters was dying. Of course, we went to see her. Because we were very close to my home town, LeAnn wanted to see what my home looked like. I didn't want to go there, but how do you refuse your child such a simple request?

So I gave them directions, we drove into the yard and I gave a sigh of relief, for I thought I was off the hook because there was no sign of anyone being home.

LeAnn, however, just had to get out and look around. Much was different for I had not been here in over fifty years. In that time things change.

I still shook as bad memories came flooding back. LeAnn went to every door knocking. Sure enough someone was home. My heart sank.

LeAnn came running back to the car. "Mom, she wants to meet you."

I didn't want to go there but it turned out to be the smartest thing I ever did.

So much was different. The inside had been gutted and rebuilt, totally different.

The visit soon became easy, for the lady of the house was truly very interested in what the house had been like and how much of the surrounding area was part of the original.

Soon the husband came home and there was a repeat then came what I was truly dreading.

"Come I'll show you what we have done upstairs." Again, I didn't want to go but how do you say no to people who have treated you so well?

I went with her and got the surprise of my life. The room where I had spent so much of my life locked up no longer existed; it was gone. With the fact that room was gone something came to me that I look on as a gift from God: the ability to honestly forgive what had happened here. Carol had not had the ability to hurt me physically for many years, but, emotionally, it was, another thing.

IV. Forgiveness: An Important but not an Easy Blessing

It maybe that this story was unnecessary, but to understand why I feel forgiveness is so important and not always easy to do, there needs something to compare it to.

I learned something very important from this experience. The ability to forgive and to be forgiven is one of the biggest blessings God gave to His people.

Forgiveness can and dose change your life.

When you truly forgive someone, especially something you have worked on trying to forgive for years, it's as if a huge weight has been lifted from your shoulders. Life becomes decidedly better and a special peace descends.

Forgiveness is not only for the one who committed the transgression but also for the one transgressed against.

Families who cannot forgive each other for small or great slights often end up broken apart. They may even get to the point where they no longer speak to each other.

The same thing happens in groups, if you belong to a club or other group of people, say there is a disagreement and instead of trying to solve it people sometimes just throw up their hands and quit. God gave us the solution forgiveness.

It may be that the people involved may not be able to find it in their hearts to forgive .

To forgive is a wonderful thing to do it is a blessing to the one who forgives and to the one who is forgiven.

Believe me I can truly testify to that for as you now know I have had personal experience with it.

God gave us a great blessing when He gave us the ability to forgive.It is such a blessing that I pray we all use it honestly, and whenever we need to for it is only thus we will reap the benefits of God's great gift.