

“(Vigil)...but their story seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them!”  
“(Day) ...and he saw ...and believed.”—*Jn. 20:1-9*

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Once upon a time**, they made a movie called, ‘*Bridge Over the River Kwai*.’ It’s the story of what happened in a Japanese prison camp along the Kwai River during WWII. There, 12,000 prisoners died of disease and brutality while being forced to build a railroad.

Men had to do hard labor in heat that reached 120°. Bareheaded and barefooted, they built the entire bed for the railroad from dirt and stone, carried in baskets on their backs. Their only clothing was the rags they wore. Their only bed was the bare ground.

But their worst enemy was not the Japanese or their hard life; it was ...themselves!

The author of the book from which the movie was made, Ernest Gordon, a prisoner there himself, said the fear of the Japanese made the prisoners paranoid. The ‘*Law of the Jungle*’ became their law: they stole from one another; they distrusted one another; they informed on one another.

The guards laughed at how the once-proud soldiers were destroying one another.

Then something incredible happened. 2 prisoners organized the others into Bible-study-groups!

Through their study of the Gospel, the prisoners gradually discovered (as in ‘*Discovering Christ*’) that Jesus was in their midst ...as a living person.

More than that, they came to discover that Jesus understood their situation:

*He, too, had no place to lay his head at night.*

*He, too, was often hungry.*

*He, too, was often bone-weary.*

*He, too, was betrayed.*

*He, too, felt the sting of the whip on his back.*

Everything about Jesus: what he was; what he said; what he did...began to make sense and to come alive.

The prisoners began to stop thinking of themselves as victims in some cruel tragedy. They stopped informing on one another. They stopped destroying one another.

Nowhere did their change of heart manifest itself more clearly than in their prayers: they began to pray, not so much for themselves, but for ...one another. And when they did pray for themselves, it was not to get something. It was to release the new power that they suddenly found ...within themselves.

Slowly, the camp went through a transformation that amazed, not only the Japanese, but also the prisoners themselves. One night, Ernest Gordon was hobbling back to his shack after a meeting with his study-group. As he walked along in the darkness, he heard the sound of men singing. Someone was keeping time with a stick on a piece of tin.

The sound of the stick hitting the tin, and the sound of the men singing, made the darkness come alive: the difference between that joyful sound and the deathly silence of past months was deafening ...the difference between life and death; the difference between death and resurrection!

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*The true story of the transformation that took place in that Japanese prison camp is a beautiful illustration of what Easter is all about.*

*Easter is the miracle that enabled the prisoners to trust one another, after having doubted one another.*

*Easter is the miracle that enabled the prisoners to share with one another, after having stolen from one another.*

*Easter is the miracle that enabled the prisoners to help one another, after having informed on one another.*

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*And this brings me to each one of us here on this beautiful Easter Vigil/Day.*

***“What, exactly, is Easter for us?” you ask.  
Well, I am glad you asked that question***

*Easter is realizing that  
...the change that took place in that prison camp ...can take place in our lives, too!*

*All we need do ...is do what the prisoners did:  
Open our hearts to the grace that Jesus won for us on that first Easter 2,000 years ago.*

***Easter holds out an invitation to each one of us in this church & within the sound of my voice:***

*It invites us to let Jesus help us to trust again, after we've had our trust betrayed.*

*It invites us to let Jesus help us to love again, after we've had our love rejected.*

*It invites us to let Jesus help us to hope again, after we've had our hope dashed to pieces.*

*It invites us to let Jesus help us pick up the broken pieces and start over again,  
after we were ready to give up.*

***This, my brothers and sisters, is what Easter is all about.***

*It's the Good News that ...nothing can ever destroy us again:*

*Not pain, not sorrow*

*Not rejection, not sin,*

*Not ...even ...death ...itself!*

*This is what we will celebrate with our new members and one another  
as we renew our baptismal promises tonight/today  
and prepare to break bread together, his precious body and blood,  
his Sacrifice, which will become our Sacrament,  
on this great birthday ...of our Christian faith!*

*May our Tri-une God bless you... the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*