

## Peace

25 7 10

The peace of God which passes all understanding  
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God  
and of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

My theme may be found in a phrase from the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the  
Philippians (4v7):

'The peace of God which surpasses all understanding'.

When did you first start to take your faith seriously? For me, it was a Sunday evening back in early July 1969 in a fairly unlikely but aptly named place – the Strangers' Rest Mission in Whitechapel in the East End of London. I had been taken there by a couple of Methodist friends and I heard a fairly challenging sermon on today's text: 'The peace of God which surpassed all understanding'. I spoke to the preacher afterwards and thereafter my life I believe took a new direction. And it is peace which is at the centre of today's sermon, the fifth and penultimate sermon in my series on understanding our service on Holy Communion.

Peace I guess is something we all seek. Peace of mind; inner peace; to know we are loved by those we love and that we do what we have been called to do. It is an inner calm that allows us to meet the storms of life with equanimity for indeed

there is real peace to be found in the eye of the storm. Peace is the third of the nine fruit of the spirit and peace is a Christian virtue which all can value.

In this service, the peace comes in the middle, a bridge between its two halves, linking as it does the Ministry of the Word to the Ministry of the Sacrament. It has a simple introduction. At present, I say

We are the body of Christ.

In the one spirit, we are all baptised.

Let us, then, pursue all that makes for peace  
and builds up our common life.

What I say points to the fact that we are the Church here; we make up the body of Christ in this place. We share a life in common and that shared life is and should be informed by God's peace.

Then I pronounce the words of the peace:

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And you reply:

And also with you.

The formula is simple but effective. I am wishing, praying that you all are blessed with God's peace and you, in turn, wish me the same. It is a perfect expression of what a church should be, a place where the priest cares for his congregation and the congregation care for him.

Finally, there is the physical exchange of peace. Now for some, it is a problem because things move on in the Church and customs do change. In the old days,

nothing happened after the peace except perhaps some smiles and encouraging eye-contact. Now we shake hands. Back in England, this became common practice. As early as Series 2 in the 60s and Series 3 in the 70s and certainly by the time of the ASB in 1980, everyone went round smiling and shaking hands – all very English. Or **NOT** depending on your point of view for certainly some were not happy with such enthusiasm, the indignity of actually touching and being touched by someone else during divine service – perhaps all very English too. When I came to St Bartholomew's first at Easter 1995, we did not exchange the peace and indeed it was not till November 2007 towards the end of my first year as your priest that we do what we do today which is discreetly to turn to our neighbour and wish them peace. It is a very beautiful thing to do because in the simple shaking of hands, in that simple touch, perhaps with a smile, we are reflecting the love of God in the way we love our neighbour. But for some, this is a step too far and touch, any form of touch, has no place for them in our ritual. Back at St Mary's in Potters Bar, those not wishing to exchange the peace simply knelt down to pray and people did not trouble them. I confess by temperament I am more Italian than English: I envy the Italians their freedom to hug and kiss each other! But in the peace, the gentle way we share the peace, we are embodying the love that should be at the heart of our faith.

I hope this helps. The peace is the bridge in our communion service between its two halves. The peace is also a bridge between God and ourselves, the inner calm we can feel though the world may rage chaotically around us. And the peace is the bridge between ourselves and those around us, perfectly expressing Jesus'

succinct summary of the Law: to love God and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's Dinard*

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H: Sermon 22: Peace

