

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity 18

James 3.13-4:3, 7-8a and Mark 9.30-37

Today is Peace Sunday. This is the Sunday nearest to the United Nations Peace Day which is 21st September.

Peace is not the absence of war, or that desire for quiet – “*I just need a bit of peace and quiet and a nice cup of tea*” – but something that is more proactive. For Christians, peace is at the very heart of who we are and what we should be doing because it springs from within the heart of God.

Every Sunday when we share The Peace – it is a statement of hope – it is a statement of defiance against the powers and authorities in the heavenly realms – it is a statement of faith in what God has done on the Cross through Christ.

The president says: *Christ is our peace. He has reconciled us to God in one body by the cross.* That is where our peace begins and ends – in Christ crucified. And the Scriptures also tell us that the peace Christ brings is peace with God that flows out into peace with one another: *We are the body of Christ, in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body. Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life*

The giving of the kiss of peace is to be found in some of the most ancient liturgies of the church with the earliest being second century found in the Apology of Justin Martyr.

The writer James tells us that *'a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace'*.

As Christians we are called to make peace between people and God (that is mission) and between each other. The Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Christian peace-making charity has recently given a to support peace-making work in Burundi in East Africa.

Members of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, will work with Coventry Cathedral's Reconciliation Ministry to rebuild trust that had broken down following fraudulent activity by a former Bishop. This work, rooted in the Christian tradition, will not only create harmony within the pastoral and staff community but also train the pastors and staff such that they can be active and engaged as reconcilers within the wider community.

Making peace is hard work – and peace in and of itself may not always be healthy.

Peace can be enforced – The peace that the Romans brought to their Empire was done through force and subjugation. In some countries the peace is so fragile it has to be protected by a UN Peace-Keeping Force.

Peace can be false because it is based in fear or collusion – we keep quiet in the face of abuse or injustice to maintain a veneer of peace while all is turbulent underneath.

But the peace of God is not a superficial peace, or one that is enforced, but one that speaks directly to the human condition, changing us root and branch by the Holy Spirit, cleansing us of sin and forgiving us, making us a new creation. We are called to imitate God, to be like Jesus and the only way we can be like him is to get to know him and follow him.

If we are disciples, then we should also be peace-makers because the way of Jesus was one of non-violence, of littleness, of love. Jesus did not coerce or trick people into the Kingdom of God. He invited and showed them compassion and the power of God. He healed and forgave and said, ‘follow me’, but he never forced.

His disciples, those closest to him didn't understand. They were surprised when Jesus put a child in their midst to counter their foolish arguments about who was the greatest. The greatest in the Kingdom of God are the least and littlest and the lost. Those who know their need of God who know they have been forgiven.

The theologian Stanley Hauerwas says: *"Those who accept forgiveness know they are no longer in control.... To be forgiven means that I must face the fact that my life actually lies in the hands of others"*
(*The Peaceable Kingdom*, pg.89)

So that is the key. If we know we are forgiven, we can be ourselves and allow others to be themselves. We no longer have to scramble our way to the top, be significant or important, have our own way, grasp at what we do not have. We can be at peace. And we can see Christ in others, because they, like us are forgiven. The foot of the cross is level ground and we are all the same. Forgiven sinners.

Being peace-makers begins with us modelling what God's peaceable kingdom looks like in our own lives. For some of us that will be harder than others.

We may be called upon to be peace-makers in our own families, or with our friend and neighbours. Some of us may be called to a community peace-making role.

Whatever our circumstances God's peace can reign in our lives as we put our trust in Him.

Whatever our circumstances, we can model peaceful interaction with our neighbours and the whole of creation through our choices and action.

Whatever our circumstances we can point people to the Cross of Christ which is the fountain of all genuine peace.

May the peace of the Lord be with you.