



19 April 2015: St John's the Baptist Pinetown

*"Peace be with you"* By Forbes T Maupa ©

**Luke 24 vs. 36b-48:** The risen Christ appears to the apostles

As the season of Easter continues, we gather again today to continue celebrating the wonderful mystery that is resurrection. In trying to give meaning to today's Gospel reading I will make use of three statements or traditions that we find in our Eucharist Liturgy (Anglican Prayer Book 1989). One of these traditions has been a source of much discomfort for some Anglican churches (and definitely here at SJB), because it continues to evolve. These traditions or statements are as follows:

"The peace of the Lord be with you always

**Peace be with you"**

(APB section 45 pg. 115 with variations on pages 142-144). There is a rubric that follows this on section 46 which states "The Peace is given according to local custom". This is taken from the various incidents of Jesus meeting and talking to his disciples as reported mostly by John and then of course Luke (John 16 vs. 33, John 20 vs. 19/21 and John 14 vs 27). Let me hasten to say that "local custom" is always difficult to pin down because customs evolve.

This is the one custom that in my experience as a priest gives some individuals discomfort and sometimes confusion; so let me talk a little bit about this discomfort. For some, especially in the old Anglican tradition, peace was declared by the priest, congregation responded without any movement and then the offertory immediately followed. Now we have seen this evolve to people shaking hands, hugging, moving up and down the pews "to share this peace". Some, because of the tradition they grew up under, others because they prefer not to shake hands or hug and still others because they find the movement during peace a bit chaotic and confusing, would prefer the "no movement" stance during peace. I am told a story which happened only a two years ago

right here at SJB where a couple left church during peace because they thought the service was over as they heard people “chatting and catching up”! As the compilers of APB 1989 realised, local custom should prevail but what is to be done when there is no common understanding of what local custom is? I am not particularly bothered by some degree of chaos as long as it is one with a sense of purpose and to a degree, some meaning. What is it that we are doing when we say we are sharing the “peace of Jesus Christ”? It is important to think about this because the message of peace is tied with the message of Resurrection in the narratives of Luke and John. First and foremost, because the disciples were genuinely worried, nervous and fearful since the painful death of Jesus; this fear needed to be addressed. What was to become of them? John 20 vs. 19 even reports “the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews”. It is this fear that Jesus appears to address. Luke further suggests that even seeing the risen Christ cause a certain degree of fear “because they thought they were seeing a ghost”. Having lived every day for three years with Jesus, his followers had a certain expectation for the future which now was “disturbed and almost derailed” by his humiliating death. This uncertainty for the future needed to be addressed and it would appear as if Jesus spoke to this. While I have no issues with us moving from pew to pew to share “the peace”, I do take reservation when we use that time to make appointments and chat about other things which may take our attention from the focus of the liturgy, sermon and prayer. Walking up and down may also cause unintended harm when some individuals feel ignored as we hug only our friends and go past others. I am comfortable hugging everyone but what about those who are not comfortable with too much body conduct. Who do we hug, who do we shake hands with and who do we simply wave at during the peace? These are questions I cannot possibly answer but simply to say let us be mindful of the role we take during the peace. It is my persuasion that we all assume the role of Jesus the Christ during that moment as we seek to declare peace to those around us who might be feeling “disturbed” and quite uncertain about some situation or the other. We are declaring to our sisters and brothers a deep message of the resurrection which seeks to bring hope when all looks bleak. To be more

specific, it is like being Jesus among the so many expatriates who are being attacked and even killed in the xenophobic/criminal wave and saying “*Peace be with you*”, to the abused woman, child, that vulnerable person and saying “Peace be with you”. This is a declaration that “*I am with you, You are not alone*”. It is not a time to ask how Chiefs fared against Sundowns or to have a quick catch-up. Rather, we do it with purpose and conviction that Jesus’ peace remains steadfast regardless of the “many fears” around us and our propensity to doubt and possibly give up. It is after such an assurance that Jesus and his disciples could share the fish as we will do today in sharing the meal at of the Eucharist after assuring each other of the PEACE of God. The ability to “eat, sit at table” comes from an assurance of peace, how can the expatriate eat if there is fear. When the peace of Jesus is given, then can we all be confident enough to sit and “share the fish”

The other appears right at the end of the Eucharist service:

“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; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always.

**Amen”**

This section is taken from Philippians 4 vs. 7 and immediately follows the dismissal

“Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

**In the name of Christ. Amen”**

(APB pg. 129 sections 89 and 90)

I rather like the symbolism of standing up when sections 89 and 90 are done. Having received the peace during the service, we further pronounce that “peace which passes all understanding” which peace we must “Go” with in all that we do. I imagine us as being in the same predicament and moment of confusion as the disciples of Jesus two thousand years ago and in need of the assurance of peace for ourselves and our country. With the peace of Jesus Christ, we shall not be afraid to go and challenge what is untoward to the humanity. Amen