

Sunday 1st May 2016 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		6th Sunday of Easter (5th Sunday after Easter)
Acts 16:9-15	Psalm 67	Revelation 21:10, 22 – 22:5
		John 14:23-29
THE PEACE OF GOD		

“Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest, and banish your fears.”
(Jn 14:27)

Easter tide

We are in the season of Easter – Easter is not a day, but a season - the great Fifty Days of celebration of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the heart of the Christian faith. We celebrate Christ’s victory over sin and evil and death.

As we say in the Eucharistic prayer during Easter: “By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising again he has restored to us eternal life.”¹ Words of hope and wonder and new life, new possibilities.

During the Fifty Days of Easter our scripture readings focus on people’s encounter with the Risen Christ, and the ways in which we meet with the Risen Christ in our lives today.

On Easter Day, we went with the women to the tomb of Christ, and found it empty; we were with Mary as she met the Risen Lord in the garden. We were with Thomas – doubting Thomas - as he first refused to believe, and then when Jesus appeared to Thomas, showed him his wounds, and we heard Thomas speak those great words of faith and belief, “My Lord and my God”. We were with the disciples as they went fishing, and were there when the Risen Christ met them on the

¹ *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, 136

lakeside, fed them with bread and fish, and then asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?”

Jesus our Risen Lord is our good shepherd, who leads us to green pastures and beside still waters (Jn 10); our Risen Lord gives us the new commandment to love one another: “If there is this love among you, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.” (Jn 13:35)

And now, today, the gift of peace, given to us by the Risen Christ – peace in the midst of storms, peace in the midst of turmoil, peace in the midst of fear. God’s peace.

Peace

What is peace? Peace for most of us is the absence of conflict, it is the silence at the end of a battle, when soldiers lay down their arms, it is the peace that hopefully we feel at the end of our exams – relief, the end of stress and worry and anxiety. That difficult neighbour finally sells their house and moves away. Peace. The person we quarrelled with leaves the school/the place where we work, and disappears from our lives. Peace. The couple who were struggling in their marriage and on the brink of divorce manage to rebuild their relationship and find a whole new way of loving one another. Peace. We long for peace; we pray for peace; we work for peace.

We study and remember the outbreak of wars; even more do we remember and celebrate the end of wars - the Armistice in 1918; the signing on the battleship that marked the end of World War 2; the agreements that ended the various wars in our own country. Peace. But it is one thing to make peace; it is another to find inward peace.

The peace of God comes to us when we are walking within God’s will. The world is in chaos because of the sin of humankind; peace is God’s gift to us in Christ. Jesus comes as the Prince of Peace to bring us peace. We find true peace – peace with God - when we are brought into relationship with God. It is then that we receive the inward peace

of Christ ('the peace of God, which is beyond all understanding' – Phil 4:7).

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When Jesus promises us peace, he also promises to send us the Holy Spirit – who will teach us everything, and who will remind us of the words of Jesus (Jn 14:26). The Holy Spirit is the one who stirs us up, who provokes us, who gives us power and courage and vision; who brings change and changes us! So the gift of peace is linked to change, to the gift of new things to discover, new understanding, new insight, new ways of thinking and being. That is disconcerting!

Because peace can also mean that nothing is happening. “She is at peace”, we say, when someone has died. A stagnant pond of water can be utterly still, peaceful – because the river has dried up, nothing is flowing in, and the pond is getting slimy and smelly: peaceful, but lifeless. Peace can mean boredom, emptiness, lifelessness, or predictability.

You may have been told, almost as a bit of bad luck, “may you live in interesting times!” Or someone will say the ancient Irish curse “may you always have builders in your life!” – builders who are always changing things, breaking down walls, putting up a new roof, fixing this, altering that – and we never have peace because there is always something changing!

And interesting times, and change, can be linked to conflict. As unpleasant as conflict is, as much as we avoid conflict, or dread conflict, it can be a way in which change happens, things shift; we can emerge from conflict stronger, perhaps with a much clearer picture of who we are as a community, what is important to us.

The gift of God’s peace, and the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gives us (John 14:25-27), is our strength during this time. We are not left

alone and helpless. God does give us the grace and strength we need. God's peace does not mean an escape from trouble. It means peace in the midst of storms and danger. It means peace in the midst of conflict. It means peace in the midst of change. It means peace in the midst of fear. It means realising that God loves us deeply, and holds us in His love, no matter what happens to us. The Risen Christ gives to you and to me, His peace.

Rape protests

We seek and pray for the peace of the Risen Christ upon us all, especially in the midst of the turmoil and anguish on Rhodes campus over these past couple of weeks, as students have protested against rape and rape culture.

We hold in prayer, and we stand with all who are victims of rape; we pray for the perpetrators; we pray for university leadership in their role of protecting and upholding the rights of all concerned. We pray particularly for those who have been further traumatised by the recent protests.

May God's peace touch and enfold us all.

There is immense pain and anger that has surfaced, particularly the pain and anger of rape survivors, and their families. It is unacceptable that our girls and women should not be safe, wherever they are. The university and our legal system have got to find a way to support rape survivors and make it easier for them.

May God's peace touch and enfold us all.

At the same time, we have been deeply concerned as protests have escalated, and as behaviour has become more and more extreme, and in some cases has crossed the boundary of what is acceptable. Everyone should feel and be safe, on campus, on our streets. Let's keep on talking, and reflecting, and doing all we can to find a way forward, to change the culture that seems to makes rape acceptable.

May God's peace touch and enfold us all.

I thank and acknowledge the many from our Cathedral community who have been involved or impacted in various ways: academic staff, students, admin and maintenance staff. When people have asked "where is the church?" or "where is Jesus in all this?" I have replied, "look around, and see the church, the body of Christ, present amongst us."

CONCLUSION

A pastoral word from the Risen Christ.

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