**Parish of Harnham**

**Lent Address**

15 March 2016

**“The Peace”**

Welcome to the fifth in our series of Lent addresses on different parts of the Communion service. Our theme today is **the Peace**.

**Peace as a greeting**

**READING 1** In the evening “the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ...While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among and said to them “Peace be with you.” (Luke 19.33,34,36)

The first words Jesus says when he meets the disciples as a group after his resurrection are “Peace be with you.” “Peace” is a greeting. I remember a friend telling me about a Jewish friend of hers. Whenever she wrote a letter she started with the word “Shalom” – the Hebrew word for ‘Peace’. It is the word in the Hebrew Bible that is translated ‘peace’ in our Bibles.

Paul nearly always starts his letters in the New Testament: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. Eight of his thirteen letters begin like that, and most of the others have just a minor variation, eg “Grace, mercy and peace ...”

“Peace” is a greeting. At the Peace in Eucharist we greet each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

What does ‘peace’ mean? The Hebrew word ’shalom’ has the idea of wholeness or sufficiency. It includes sufficiency in the necessities of life, and good health. It includes living in harmony in the family and with neighbours. Resentments, jealousies, mutual antagonism, avoiding talking to one another because you cannot stand each other – these are the destroyers of peace. It is a word with rich meaning, much more than simply peace of mind or absence of war

**Peace is God’s gift to us**

**READING 2** At the Last Supper “Jesus said to his disciples “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” ” (John 14.27)

Peace is God’s gift to us, not something we earn. Rather it comes from God’s generosity to His children, and it is a way of life he calls us to follow.

By contrast, absence of peace is cause for grief and sorrow.

**READING 3** “Jesus was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives. ..... As he came near and saw the city (of Jerusalem) he wept over it, saying “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace ! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” (Luke 19.37, 41, 42)

This is a poignant passage. It is Palm Sunday. The pilgrims from Galilee are arriving in Jerusalem after their long journey from Galilee. They have come to celebrate the Passover Festival in Jerusalem. They are happy and excited. They are shouting and singing the traditional pilgrim psalms and waving palm branches. And amidst all this cheerful excitement, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. He can see that people’s lack of understanding about peace, their lack of awareness of how to live in peace, will bring disaster on Jerusalem. His warnings in the next few verses look back to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar 600 years before. They look forward to the siege and destruction of the city by the Roman Army under Titus in year 70. As Isaiah says :”There is no peace for the wicked.”

**Peace is God’s blessing**

**READING 4**

 The Lord bless you and keep you;

 The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

 The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

(Numbers 6.24-26)

This is very old. It is sometimes called the Aaronic blessing. It is the blessing the sons of Aaron, the priests of Israel, used to bless ancient Israel. It is still used occasionally nowadays. The gift of peace is an integral part of God’s blessing of His people.

Peace an essential part of the Messianic age, the age that is anticipated in the Old Testament, brought to us by Jesus the Messiah, the Anointed One, the *Christos,*  but is a vision and a promise that is still to be realised in its fullness.In the Old Testament the Messiah is the One who brings peace to a world that all too often does not know peace.

The last two readings will be familiar to you as they are often read in Christmas carol services in the days leading up to Christmas.

**READING 5**

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given;

 Authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named

 Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

 His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace.

(Isaiah 9.6,7a)

**READING 6**

But you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah,

 who are one of the little clans of Judah,

 from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel,

 whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,

 in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

 And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the end of the earth;

 and he shall be the one of peace. (Micah 5.2,4,5a)

So when we greet each other in Eucharist “The peace of the Lord be with you”, this is no light thing. This is a profound statement : a greeting, a blessing, one of God’s greatest gifts. That is what we are giving to each other.

So let it be unhurried – no rushing from one person to next as if there was a prize for whoever greeted the most people. Let it be unhurried. Let us look at each other. We are saying something important. Let us be aware of each other as brother or sister in Christ ..... and don’t, don’t talk about anything else. This is not time for a chat. In a recent service I greeted someone with the Peace and he replied ‘Oh! Your hands are cold’. What a let down ! ‘The Peace’ is greeting one another with God’s blessing as brothers and sisters in Christ, and there’s plenty of time for chatting over coffee.

*David Durston*