

A few years ago, while I was waiting to take up my post here in Tenerife, I went to lead the Sunday Eucharist at a country church in Shropshire that I hadn't been to before. As I stood at the back of the church just outside the vestry, about to process in to begin the celebration, a latecomer walked past me, full of 'Christian joy.' 'Good morning, Sir', he said, without a hint of a smile. Just to let you know that we don't do any of that handshaking, 'peace be with you' stuff here!' I told him, that was fine, I would wait until after the service before shaking his hand and wishing him peace. He grunted and went to take his seat. If he was the last to arrive, he must have been first to leave, because there was no sign of him as I quickly emerged from the vestry to greet the people when the service ended.

This little encounter reminded me of an amusing song by Richard Stilgoe and Peter Skellern, about a lady called Mrs Beamish. In the song she complains about all the 'new-fangled ways' that have been introduced in her parish church by the new vicar. God forbid, people are now clapping and even raising their hands while singing! And the hymns, well, if she had not heard them in her childhood, they were not proper hymns. Worse still, the beloved organ was sometimes being replaced by the devil's own instruments: guitars and tambourines! And there was one more monstrous innovation as the chorus of the song makes clear:

"Don't you dare shake hands with me, or offer signs of peace. You lay a finger on me, and I'll send for the police.

Don't whisper 'peace be with you' - this is the C of E.

So bend the knee, say 'thou and thee' - and keep your hands off me!"

Peace be with you! The very words of the risen Jesus as he greeted his disciples. It sounds an odd greeting, but, of course, these were the usual words with which one Jew greeted another, and they still are. The Hebrew word for 'peace' is 'Shalom.' Its meaning is very profound. It is wishing the other peace at the deepest level – peace of body, mind and spirit. It expresses love, friendship, solidarity. It is that level of peace which is intended in the Peace greetings in our services.

So when we exchange the Peace we are greeting each other with the words of Jesus, and with the same meaning. We recognise that the risen Jesus stands here among us and in us, and as us. He brings his peace to us.

In these early post-pandemic times, we have insisted that the touching with handshakes or hugs remains optional. But let us never regard the Peace as a folksy or intrusive interlude in the liturgy. It is in fact part of our sacramental encounter with the Lord. He shares his peace with us, and with the intention that we pass it on to others, and that its spirit and meaning is communicated to those outside, those we relate to, day by day, and indeed to the whole world. This regular community gathering, the Lord's Supper, is a demonstration of union, of oneness, between God and us, with each other in the Christian life, and between us and the world. Our Christian family meal is the sacrament of unity and peace, and a foretaste of our complete union with God and with one another in eternity.

But eternity, or eternal life must not for now be our chief concern. And Resurrection is not just about our future destiny. As the scholarly Bishop Tom Wright put it, 'the Resurrection stories in the Gospels do not say, Jesus is raised, therefore we're going to heaven.... They say, 'Jesus is raised, therefore God's new creation has begun and we've got a job to do.' The Resurrection of Jesus did not happen simply to reassure his disciples about a future beyond the grave. Like most Jews of that generation, they already believed in the resurrection of the dead and life after life.

The Easter event was first of all a vindication, God's big 'yes' to Jesus and all that he was about, and God's big 'no' to the violent and corrupt powers that killed him. Through the resurrection experience, the disciples finally came to understand what Jesus had been about when they had accompanied him in his ministry: they now came to share his vision for life on this earth; that the kingdom of God which he came to proclaim was about a way of life that God wished for all humanity, and for here and now on this earth.

Each of us who follow Christ is called to play a part in bringing about this divine vision for life on earth. Our second reading today reminds us of how we are called to be children of God, that is to live in and share the Father's likeness, as made known to us most clearly in the person of Jesus. Creating and enabling

such an enhanced life had been Jesus's passion while he was on earth, and he called his friends to follow him.

And that means living and sharing his Peace, his Shalom. It is a peace that expresses love, friendship, reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, justice for the poor and oppressed, living and working for a world where nobody is excluded. The peace of Christ involves all of that and more. We have received it from him, we must pass it on for him. Through our baptism, or our later acceptance of its meaning, we have committed ourselves to following the way of Christ. We've got a job to do, all of us, individually and together. Our awesome calling and identity as Christians is that we are the Body, the visible incarnate presence of Jesus Christ on earth today. He has given us the Holy Spirit, the power and resources for our task. The most important resource or gift of the Spirit that we have with which to change the world is love. It is a love that should give us joy in our worship, our fellowship, and our living, a love will create peace in our hearts, a peace, *shalom*, that we wish to share with those we encounter in daily life.