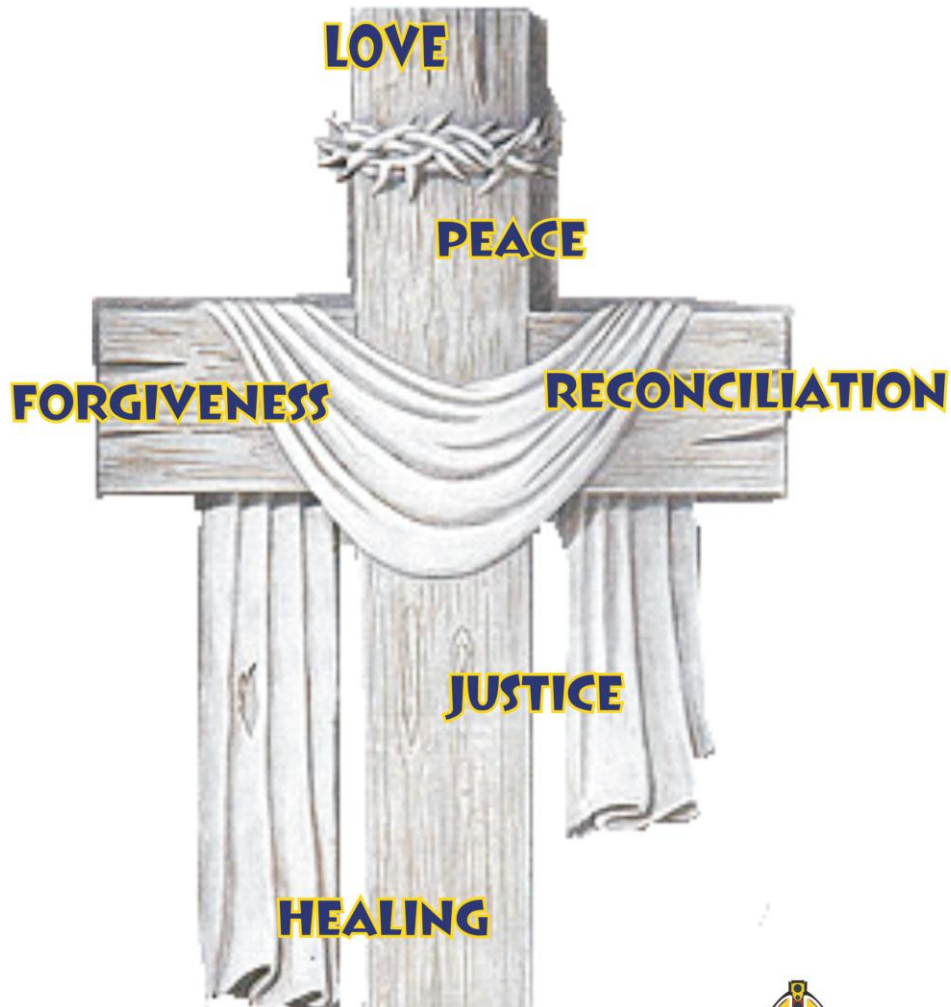


AGENTS OF TRANSFORMING JUSTICE AND PEACE



HOPE
AFRICA



Contents

1. Foreword: Archbishop Thabo Makgoba	3
2. Introduction: Bishop Jo Seoka	4
3. Week 1: Reconciliation	6
4. Week 2: Forgiveness	8
5. Week 3: Healing	10
6. Week 4: Justice	12
7. Week 5: Love	14
8. Week 6: Peace	16

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Foreword – Lent Bible Studies 2009

Dear People of God, dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa,

In the Charge I gave at my Installation, I thanked you for being partners with me in the gospel, and invited you all to join me in seeking afresh to discover what it is to be the body of Christ in our time, and who God is in Jesus Christ, for us here and now.

These Bible Studies have been prepared to help us in our explorations. They take the six Christian themes of love, peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing, and, by placing Bible passages alongside stories from our own Province, prompt us to consider what each of these might mean in practice, for us today.

Lent is a good time for asking these questions. Often we think of Lent as a time for giving things up – but giving up, just for its own sake, is of limited value. Rather, Lent should be a time of stepping back from some of the preoccupations and distractions that are so much part of our busy lives, and creating space for reflecting on the more fundamental elements that should guide and direct our lives, as we try to follow Jesus faithfully. Jesus' desire is not merely that we should know about God's love, peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing, but that we should experience their reality within our own lives, and become channels so that others might experience them too.

My prayer for you all echoes a famous prayer of St Paul for the Ephesians, that, through these studies, 'you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saint, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love – and peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing – of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.'

May God bless you, and make you a channel of blessing, 'sekgo sa metse', for others.

Bishop Jo Seoka

SEKGO sa METSE: Called and Sent to be Vessels of Peace and Forgiveness

“Called and sent to be vessels”. This is an effort on the part of a number of people elected by the Archbishop to design a Bible study based on his Charge. The group has been constituted with due regard for principles of inclusivity and gender sensitivity, with members being drawn from five Diocese of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA). Much prayer and consultation has gone into this project before and during writing of the bible study. I am satisfied that all precautions have been taken to ensure that the material produced is relevant to our calling to proclaim the Gospel. So, we are inviting you to consider allowing the use of this material - Bible study - in your diocese and parish, even if you have already decided on another, for the sake of synchronization of our Church’s teaching.

This booklet is based on the themes of the Archbishop’s Charge delivered at the service of his installation and dedication (Sekgo sa metse – vessel of water). It is his wish that all Parishioners of the ACSA study these themes and implement them in their lives.

The authors of this material trust that these Bible studies will draw the faithful together for study and prayer, and, in addition, will assist individuals to reflect on what these Bible studies mean in their personal context. We also encourage those who may not be able to attend communal meetings to use the material for personal reflection and spiritual enrichment.

In total, there are six Bible studies prepared for Lent including Holy Week. We have deliberately included Holy Week, because we believe that the meditations of Holy Week are important as part of the Penitential liturgy. Themes that we have selected are: Love (Mark 12:28-34); Peace (1 Peter 3:10-12); Justice (Micah 6:8); Forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35); Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21); and Healing (John 5:1-9). Each Bible study includes the same elements or sections: prayer, the biblical text, story, reflection, and discussion questions. The order varies from Bible study to Bible study, but each Bible study ends with questions which are meant to focus the group on the theme during discussions. These also assist participants to sharpen and deepen their thoughts on how to apply scripture in dealing with social issues raised by the Archbishop in his Charge.

The group is asked to elect one of their number to facilitate and guide the participants in their discussions. S(he) must be a person who is committed to be part of the group for the whole duration of the study period, and who will prepare beforehand, so that s/he is familiar with the material to be studied and able to facilitate the group. The leader is requested not to monopolize the conversation by talking too much but rather to give members the space to engage. It is important to allow the scripture to speak for itself. This does not exempt the group from doing their own preparation before the communal meeting, thereby ensuring that all members are fully equipped to engage with the group.

It is also important to begin each session by creating a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere so that every participant is comfortable. Sitting in a circle is recommended, but the group can use their discretion taking into account the environment in which they meet. Once all are familiar with each other and relaxed the leader may ask another member to open the meeting with prayer or he/she can do so. All sessions should start and end with prayer, said by one of the group members. The facilitator should involve the group in reading the various sections of the Bible study, trying to involve as many of the group as possible. The discussion questions are open and the facilitator should create an atmosphere that is sacred and safe so that people may share deeply and personally.

It is our wish that this series of Bible studies be used beyond Lent, so that the life of the Parish is influenced in an ongoing way by its outcomes. It is also desirable that the language used during Bible study is sensitive to gender, which means it must be inclusive.

The members of the Bible study are all clergy and lay persons of the ACSA. Professor Denise Ackerman, Reverends Natalie Simons-Arendse, Vicentia Kgabe, Luke Pato, Charles Lagan, Trevor Pearce and Jo Seoka. Professor Gerald West is the reader and editor of the whole Bible study.

**Bishop of Pretoria &
Chairperson of the Working Committee**

Theme: Reconciliation
2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Prayer

(A prayer attributed to St Francis)

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace,
where there is hatred, let us sow love,
where there is injury, pardon,
where there is discord, union,
where there is doubt, faith,
where there is despair, hope,
where there is darkness, light,
where there is sadness, joy.*

*Grant that we may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;
it is pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

A story

The following is an extract from the submission by Bishop Michael Nuttall to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on 30 June 1997 on behalf of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa:

The CPSA ... wishes to place on record that, as a body corporate, it repents sincerely and absolutely for any possible violation that occurred by omission or commission. It further seeks forgiveness from any who may harbour feelings towards the Church that it infringed their human rights and prays that any such persons would come forward so that true healing and reconciliation can take place. The CPSA recommits itself to the ministry of reconciliation and healing ... to achieve moral reconstruction and healing and the revitalisation of individuals within our society. Recognising that much of the poverty evident in South Africa is a result of the inhumane system of apartheid, it commits itself, as part of its ministry to redress the wrongs of the past, to a programme of action to eradicate poverty in all its forms (noting that poverty is more than just the absence of material wealth). It reaffirms its belief in the Rule of Law and for the maintenance of human rights, to which it has pledged itself. Grace and Peace.... (Nuttall, 1997)

2 Corinthians 5:16-21:

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Reflection

This text is about the reconciliation with God accomplished in Jesus Christ, which serves as the hope which Christians proclaim.

For the apostle Paul and for Christians in every age, the governing principle is the love of Christ which is revealed in his suffering and death on behalf of all creation. The suffering and death of Jesus Christ opens the way to new life. The disciples no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

A person who lives for Christ sees every person through the eyes of Jesus Christ, as someone whom Christ loves and redeems, someone for whom Christ died. Through the death of Jesus Christ, what is old has passed away. Through his resurrection, new life is present. When the disciples no longer live for themselves but for Christ and the people around them, their sisters and brothers, there is truly new life, new beginnings.

The reconciliation which has taken place must be proclaimed as the living hope for humankind and the world.

Discussion questions

1. What is the basis for reconciliation and forgiveness?
2. With whom should I be reconciled and how?
3. Why should we take up the challenge of reconciliation?
4. What for you is a hindrance to reconciliation?

Closing prayer

Loving and gracious God, you reconciled us with you and with one another through the life, death and resurrection of your son Jesus Christ. For this we are truly thankful. Pour your Holy Spirit on us so that we too may be agents of reconciliation and hope to the broken-hearted and hopeless.

Amen.

Theme: Forgiveness Matthew 18:21-35

Prayer

*Our compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger,
abounding in love and faithfulness,
maintaining love to thousands,
and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.
Help us to plunge the depths of your forgiveness anew,
Through Jesus our sin-bearing Saviour. Amen.
(Based on Exodus 34:6, 7)*

Matthew 18:21-35:

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Reflection

Pause to reflect in silence on the passage for 2 or 3 minutes.

Now consider ...

The rabbis taught that people should forgive those who offend them three times. Peter, trying to be generous, asked Jesus if seven times (the perfect number) wasn't better. "Not seven, but seventy times seven", answered Jesus, suggesting an infinite amount of times!

This passage, in the spirit of the beatitudes, sets Christ's sacrifice for forgiveness of all our sins, as the standard that we should aim at.

A (true) story

The scene is a Truth and Reconciliation court room in South Africa. It may help to close your eyes so as to try and picture what happened.

A frail black woman, something over 70, listens to hours of testimony against Van Der Broek, a white security policeman. He had shot her son at close range and then burnt his body whilst partying with colleagues. Months later he arrested her husband. Then two years later he collected her to watch them burn his badly beaten body too. She heard his last words before dying: "Father forgive them..."

Having listened to the confessions offered by Van Der Broek, a member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission turns to her and asks, "So what do you want? How should justice be done to this man who has so brutally destroyed your family?" "I want three things," begins the old woman calmly, but confidently. "I want first to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial." Secondly, "My husband and son were my only family. I want Mr Van Der Broek to become my son. I would like him to come twice a month to our township to spend the day with me, so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining in me.

And finally, I want a third thing. This is also the wish of my husband. I wish to take Mr Van Der Broek in my arms and embrace him, to let him know that he truly is forgiven." As the court assistants come to lead the elderly woman across the room, Mr. Van Der Broek, overwhelmed by what he has heard, faints. As he does, those in the courtroom, family, friends, neighbours -- all victims of decades of oppression and injustice -- begin to sing, softly but assuredly, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me..."

Discussion questions

1. What is forgiveness? Simply forgetting? Discuss briefly.
2. Put yourself in the shoes of the old lady. How would you have responded? In which ways was the old lady living out the teachings of Jesus in the above passage of scripture? Reflect on verses 32-35. Then reflect on this quote: "People who cannot forgive break the bridge over which they themselves must pass." How does this help you or challenge you – especially if you have had a bitter experience?
3. In which ways does this teaching of Jesus and the story encourage us, rebuke us, empower us or correct us? Give examples from your own life.

Closing prayer

Reflect on 1 John 1:8-10. Our ability to forgive deeply comes from a deep experience of Christ's forgiveness. Share briefly one prayer need with your group – either to receive Christ's forgiveness or to forgive another. Pray briefly for each person immediately after they have shared.

Theme: Healing John 5:1-9

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, you are our healing salves and our salvation. You walk among us with compassion and love for you have seen how we are afflicted, and helpless of ourselves to do anything. Give us your living water to drink, that it may well up in us to eternal life. Amen

Reflection and a story

This week we are thinking about the need for healing in our own lives, in our homes and in our community. Our hospitals cannot cope with the sheer numbers; long queues of people wait and grow thirsty and hungry throughout the day.

Anthony de Mello tells the story about some people who were on a raft off the coast of Brazil perishing from thirst. They did not know that the water they were floating on was fresh water. A powerful river was flowing out to sea with such force that it created a freshwater current two miles out.

Often a particular mind-set can close our minds completely to the wonderful possibilities around us. We brainwash ourselves to dwell on the negative at the cost of seeing what God has in store for us.

John 5:1-9:

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³ In these lay many invalids-- blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁴ ⁵ One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" ⁷ The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." ⁸ Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." ⁹ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath.

Discussion questions

1. What does this story from John tell us about Jesus as Healer?
2. “Do you want to be made well?” This seems a strange question to ask someone who has been waiting 38 years for healing! Does he answer Jesus or blame his situation?
3. What might Jesus speak into your situation today? Do you really want to be whole?
4. See the man by the pool, waiting so long, so near yet so far from his healing. Jesus takes the situation in hand with authority, to shock him out of self-pity: ‘Stand up, take up your mat, and walk!’ In what ways do you need to be shocked into action by the word of Jesus the healer?
5. Do you have a story to tell about waiting for attention at your local hospital/clinic?
6. How can ‘the headed’ become ‘Healers’?

Closing Prayer

*Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, you walk with us on our exodus-journey to peace and wellness, reminding us that without you we can do nothing. As we move out of the great Passover of Easter week give us a positive and creative spirit and help us with new energy to stand up, get our lives together and walk joyfully into the new life.
Amen.*

Theme: Justice Micah 6:8

Prayer

Risen Lord, you come to meet us in so many ways, hidden but always present in our human encounters. Give us eyes to see you and hearts to recognize you in the signs you give. Give us willing hands and feet that we may feed the poor, and care for the sick, the homeless and the displaced. Give us eager spirits to be your agents for justice in our communities so that your reign may come on earth. Amen.

Micah 6:8

⁸ *He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Reflection

Two major themes run throughout the whole of the Bible: love and justice. Love without justice can be nothing more than sentimental attachment instead of lasting true relationship. Justice without love can be no more than a pitiless enforcing of laws and regulations without regard for the person. There are few texts in the Bible that are as simple and as clear on what it means to believe in God with all our heart, mind and soul than this short passage. In the preceding verses it is made clear that God does not desire lavish offerings from the people (v.6,7). Micah 6:8 is a clear and simple summary of what God in fact requires from all who profess faith in God. This biblical text does this in legal, ethical and covenantal terms. It is a verse that speaks into the heart of the story below, a story that tells of people's suffering when the systems they live in are unjust. It also tells of the triumph of love for your neighbour in the midst of adversity.

A story

Thembi and Luyiso left their village near East London to find work in Cape Town in the early eighties. They were driven to do so by the closure of factories in their area and their desire to educate their daughter Sophie. They built a small but secure shack on the outskirts of Nyanga, while Thembi worked as a domestic in the southern suburbs and Luyiso worked as a night watchman for a factory in Bellville until his death in 1998. Sophie went to school and because she was good at sums, she worked at the till in a nearby Shoprite after completing standard eight. In 2002 Sophie grew thin and listless. Eventually she was too ill to work and she died of tuberculosis in 2003.

Today, Thembi takes care of Sophie's two children and shares her shack with Anna and her daughter Rosie. Thembi and Anna worship in the same parish and they became friends through both singing in the choir. Anna is divorced after twelve years of an abusive marriage. After the divorce she tried hard to stay on in her little house with Rosie. But after many countless efforts to get the maintenance she was entitled to, she had to give up her home. When

Thembi heard of Anna's predicament she did not hesitate to offer her a roof over her head.

These two women share what they have, and they keep singing in the face of adversity. They have built a room on to their shack that is frequently a safe place for women fleeing from violent situations in their families. "I know what it is like to have nothing when you have to run away", says Anna. "How can we not help them?" Thembi and Anna are active in their community in seeking better housing for the poor, protection for abused women and maintenance for divorced mothers. They find help in the local Black Sash advice office, and have established a group in their church where abused women are heard, comforted and protected. "There is no justice in the system for the poor", says Thembi, "but we share what we have and we teach others to fight for their rights. It takes time. But we won't give up. Perhaps I will have my new house next year. I trust in God because God cares and God hates injustice. I trust in him".

Discussion questions

1. What injustices have Thembi and Anna suffered in their lives? Notice how these injustices relate to unjust systems.
2. In this verse God requires three things from us. What are they?
 - 2.1 Let's begin with the injunction "to walk humbly with your God". When do I find it difficult to be humble? What prevents me from being humble? Discuss how accepting the truth that all that I have and all that I am, is a grace from God, helps me to "walk humbly".
 - 2.2 In this verse we are told to "do justice". How does doing justice differ from believing in the need for justice? Give everyone in the group time to think about how they can "do justice" in their communities in these times. Then share thoughts and options for action that will promote justice. Why is humility necessary for doing justice? What would justice be like without humility?
 - 2.3 "Kindness" is almost an old fashioned word that means to be good by nature. To be good and kind is to care with gentleness and trust. Imagine and then discuss what 'kind' acts for justice would be like.
3. Look again at Thembi and Anna's story in the light of Micah 6:8. What can we learn from them? Notice how they have not merely been victims of injustice but how they have triumphed over injustice. Thembi says: "God hates injustice". God requires that justice be done. See also Psalm 82:3-4, Matthew 23:23-26, James 2:14-17.

Closing Prayer

God of love, God of justice, all that we have is from your hand. We affirm anew our faith that your will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. With Mary, we pray that your mercy be with those who fear you from generation to generation, that the proud will be scattered, the mighty brought down, the hungry filled with good things, and send the rich away empty. You are our God, faithful to your promises, steadfast in your love and abounding in mercy. For this we thank you. In the name of Jesus we offer this prayer. Amen.

Theme: Love
Mark 12:28-34

Prayer

I love you today, God.

I love you for all you are in me, all you are through me, all you do as me.

I love the realization that your grace is my strength.

I love the understanding that your truth is my power.

*As I become aware and embrace all that you are as the essence of me,
I realize that I love you today, God, and I thank you for loving me back.*

Amen.

A story

A young boy was sent to the store by his mother to buy a loaf of bread. He was gone much longer than it should have taken him. When he finally returned his mother asked, "Where have you been? I have been worried sick about you." "Well," he answered, "there was a little boy by the side of the road with a broken bicycle who was crying. So I stopped to help him." "I did not know you knew anything about fixing bikes" his mother said. "I don't," he replied; "I just stayed there and cried with him."

Mark 12:28-34:

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; ³³ and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbour as oneself,'-- this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Reflection

Jesus is at the centre of a series of disputes within the Temple precincts. This is one of many questions that he had faced. One of the teachers of the Law steps forward and asks a question: "What is the greatest of all the commandments?" The rabbis had added up all the Laws and come to the conclusion that God had given the people 613 commandments to obey. His question is "Which of these 613 is the most important?" In his reply Jesus joins two commandments together. The first one is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the Shema, which a Hebrew child was taught from earliest childhood. However Jesus adds a

second commandment to this from Leviticus 19: 18 and concludes “There is no greater commandment than these.”

We are called to love and love without prejudice, to love God and to love our neighbour. In His reply Jesus uses the word “all” with each of the nouns that follow, namely, “heart”, “mind”, “soul”, and “strength”. He is emphatic that love of God is to be total. Love of God is to encompass every aspect, every power, absolutely everything there is of us. “All” leaves nothing out. Jesus then follows this with the practical outworking of loving God – love for your neighbour.

Discussion questions

1. Where do we see God’s love?
2. What does it feel like?
3. How does it show itself?
4. Why do we sometimes find it hard to love God?
5. How do you show love to your neighbour?

Closing Prayer

Merciful Lord,

***you have taught us through your Son
that love is the fulfilling of the law.***

Grant that we may love you

with our whole heart,

and our neighbours as ourselves.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Theme: Peace I Peter 3:10-12

Prayer

Creator God, maker of all good things. We thank you that you promise to bring peace and wholeness to those whom you have created in your image. Help us to be constantly mindful that Christ died for all people and enable us to respect the wonderful unity of all people despite our circumstances. You have placed us on earth to live in peace with one another – help us to show the loving attitude of Jesus. Amen.

A story

Three young people were invited to attend a youth camp during the school holidays. One was Jewish, one was Muslim and one was Christian. On arriving at the camp site, they met young people from other parts of the world and they were asked to divide into groups to discuss the word peace. The group discussions were heated and very intense and the organizers, who had been prepared for a mixed response, were somewhat overwhelmed by the emotions that this discussion had invoked amongst the young people. Some of them felt quite strongly that the concept of peace needed to be unpacked more because it means different things for different people in different contexts.

1 Peter 3:10-12:

¹⁰ For "Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

Reflection

“Let them seek peace and pursue it.”

Peace is not just the absence of war or violence. Peace is knowing that you have some kind of employment where you can earn money to feed your family or to pay for the antiretrovirals that your younger sister needs because she is infected with HIV. One of the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) is to end poverty and hunger, and the starting point for us should be to ask why poverty and hunger exist. Poverty and hunger exist because there is an uneven distribution of resources among God's people. By resources, we mean access to education and health facilities as well as equal opportunities in all areas of life for both women and men. When people are not treated equally, those who are on the fringes of society will question this, often in the only way that they know how – in a violent way and the peace that we all long for will seem like a dim light far in the distance.

The Shalom or the peace that is being referred to in the text is a peace that we as Christians must firstly have a yearning for and then the drive and the passion to pursue. The current state of our society and the wider world is evidence that there is no peace because we are fighting for survival; governments are invading and even killing their fellow human beings for the sake of economic power and progress; and only those who have access to resources will be the ones to think that the world is at peace.

Discussion questions

1. Share some insight into what peace would look like for you and your community.
2. Do you think that the business of pursuing peace is for a certain group of people only – like the government or civil society organizations or the church?
3. The text says let them seek peace and pursue it. In which ways can you seek peace in your context?
4. The peace that Jesus preaches is a peace that has a positive outcome for everyone who is involved. In a world where we have to compete for everything, how would you advocate peace so that all parties feel that they have been heard?
5. Jesus often had to bend the rules of his time in order to be effective in his ministry and as a consequence, he made many enemies. In your opinion, can the pursuit of peace be a peaceful exercise?
6. Going back to the story of the Jew, the Muslim and the Christian at the camp site, do you think that they would be able to overcome their diversities in pursuit of peace?

Closing Prayer

*Almighty God, we are privileged to share in the loving,
healing and peaceful mission of your son Jesus Christ.*

May your Spirit make us wise.

May your Spirit renew and strengthen us.

So that we will be

strong in faith,

discerning in proclamation,

courageous in witness,

and persistent in our pursuit of peace.

Amen.