

God's Peace

In the Episcopal Church we have The Way of Love, seven intentional practices that embody our commitment to follow Jesus. The final practice is REST. This rest is being at peace with our creator. We seek to dwell in God and have God dwell in us. Through this we move to be at peace with ourselves and to be at peace with others. I want to talk about this peace.

We have not had one in a while, but in the course of a normal Eucharist service, we kneel and corporately confess our sins. We rise to our absolution. We go on to share our newness and welcome each other before we feast as a family at Christ's table. We look one another in the eye and say, "God's Peace." We pass the peace and in-so-doing we celebrate Love's victory. But how do we pass the peace in our homes, in our neighborhoods and on our streets? Outside the bubble/ outside the walls of this church it gets odd and dangerous and untidy.

I want to tell you a story, the story of Samantha Francine. This event happened one week ago in Montana. Samantha Francine is a woman of color, who while peacefully protesting, was verbally assaulted by a white man. Someone captured a photo of this encounter. The man is angry. He is cussing Samantha while Samantha Francine stands tall and looks him right in the eye. The image alone is powerful, a portrait of courage in the face of hate and evil. But digging deeper we meet the marrow. You see, Samantha Francine, a black woman was raised by a single father, who happened to be white. Samantha said, "He taught us from a young age that things were going to be different for us just because of the color of our skin. One of the things he used to remind us of constantly was that 'No matter the threat, always look them in the eye so they have to acknowledge that you're human.'" "My father passed 16 years ago this month," she wrote. "In this moment, those are the words that went through my head. When he lifted up his glasses, he saw me. I saw him. He was acting out of fear, I know that. I hold no malice in my heart for this man. I hope this moment will soften him. I hope he will be changed. But, even if he isn't, I am."

God's Peace. God's Peace in action!

I see the words in Matthew's gospel: "As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return unto you."

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The peace we share is not reliant on its reception. People may take a pass on passing the peace, but the peace returns to us, as it returned to Samantha Francine.

My prayer all this week has been, "God's Peace!" We all live outside of ourselves. What happens if we return to the warmth of the heart? Praying, "God's Peace" is a prayer of return. The human heart is where God dwells. The human heart is where the daunting, mystery of the Holy Spirit hides. The heart is where Christ's love flourishes and is never exhausted. Until we return to our hearts, we will not know peace and we will certainly not know justice.

On this day I say God's Peace to you. God's Peace to my family. God's Peace to our parish. God's Peace to the police. God's Peace to victims of racial violence. God's Peace to Breonna Taylor. God's Peace to George Floyd. God's Peace to Rayshard Brooks. And God's Peace to the bones of their ancestors.

How will you pass God's Peace?

Let us pray:

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart (and especially the hearts of the people of this land), that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.