

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 24:36-53

“Peace be with you.” (26:36). This greeting by Jesus to the disciples occurs in both Luke and John on two separate post-resurrection appearances (see John 20:19-21). On one level, we could see this as simply a cultural greeting of the day. But over the last 2000 years, Christians have embraced this greeting/statement of Jesus and have utilized it (appropriately, I’d say) within worship gatherings of the Church (usually known as sharing the “sign of peace” or “passing the peace”). As I was listening to the sermon yesterday, I noted that I wanted to Google this statement, just to see what popped up. Among the 26 million+ results (in .41 seconds, mind you), was this one article I’d like to quote here (along with a link for the entire article if you’re interested...which I would recommend).

For those who did not grow up with the historic Christian liturgy, the passing of the peace before communion appears to be a fancy form of the “greet your neighbor” portion of the modern evangelical worship service. In evangelicalism, the purpose for greeting one’s neighbor is twofold: 1) make newcomers feel welcome and connected so that they return and eventually join the church; and 2) give friends a time to say hello to each other. The second purpose seems to predominate; the “meet and greet” at the beginning of worship could go on forever when friends chat in the aisle.

The passing of the peace before communion shares some characteristics with the evangelical greeting ritual: it is a greeting, and usually involves shaking hands. The similarity, however, ends there.

In the historic liturgy, the offering of peace to each other does not come at the beginning of the worship service, but before the offering and the Eucharistic prayer. It comes after the reading of the scriptures and the preaching of the sermon. In other words, we offer our peace to each other in response to God’s word. Our peace is not the natural state of affairs; it exists only because it has been created by the word of God, and by what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. When we offer peace to each other, it is an act of faith, believing that God has called and empowered us to do this.

<https://milewis.wordpress.com/2012/01/17/greeting-peace-be-with-you/>

I must admit that the first two articles I read made me chuckle. The first was by a person who stated that she really disliked the “passing of the peace” part of mass, while the second was by a person who stated that it wasn’t done in the past two masses she had attended and she really missed it. (It’s nice to know that you can’t please everybody, Catholic or Protestant...and don’t even get me started on missing the point of worship; i.e. focusing on God not our preferences.)

Additionally, our friends at The Bible Project have a great little video on the Biblical idea of “peace” that I’d also recommend. <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/the-advent-series/> (scroll down to the “peace” video)

Something to keep in mind is that Luke is writing his gospel roughly 30 years after the actual events took place. With that in mind, it is important to notice what Luke focuses on (even stresses) as he wraps up his first volume (the book of Acts being “volume 2”).

Two emphases come into focus as Luke ends his account: first, Luke stresses that Jesus is back “in the flesh”. While His resurrected body was better, improved, superior, non-corrupted compared to His original body, Jesus was nevertheless very physical and incarnate. The reason this is important is that among the earliest of heresies that the Christian faith faced was the idea that Jesus wasn’t actually God-in-the-flesh. Greek ideology would naturally balk at the idea of spirit and material/flesh comingling. So, by the time of Luke’s writing...early seeds of heresy were already being encountered. Specifically, Docetism—an early form and foundation for Gnosticism which believed that Jesus’ physical body was an illusion, thus so was the crucifixion and resurrection—may have been a driving reason why Luke stressed Jesus’ physicality in this last section of his book. Jesus tells His disciples to “*Look at my hands and feet. It is I Myself! Touch Me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.*” (24:39). Additionally, asking for food and eating it also demonstrates Jesus’ actual physicality. One way we can, generally, conceive of New Testament Scripture (again, generally) is as refuting some kind of false teaching or correcting inconsistent living.

The second emphasis we see Luke making is how everything that had occurred (namely, the suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection) had been foretold in the Old Testament and was a fulfillment of the Old Testament. Twice in this closing chapter Luke stresses this: see 24:25-27 and 24:44. Something we always want to keep in mind about Scripture is that it is primarily a story and Jesus is the main character of the story, from cover to cover (even the correcting of false teaching portions of Scripture alluded to earlier are framed within a larger story, thus getting the story and its implications correct). Luke was going out of his way, because Jesus went out of His way, to make sure people understood this. So, while Luke’s first emphasis was more targeted toward a Greek/Gentile reader (i.e. someone with Greek philosophy/ideology as their foundational paradigm), this second emphasis was targeted toward a Jewish reader (i.e. someone with OT Scripture as their basic paradigm). Luke did a great job of covering his bases!

I would recommend reading 24:45-53 along with Acts 1:1-11. In a masterful way, Luke provides a kind of overlap connecting his two volumes. There are three points of attention shared by these two passages. First, the role the early disciples (and subsequently the Church) would play in Kingdom advancement through being witnesses and continuing to preach the Gospel to all nations (i.e. the Great Commission—which each gospel has some variation of). Second, staying/waiting in Jerusalem until empowered by the Holy Spirit for the task ahead. Jesus didn’t begin His ministry until He was baptized and anointed by the Holy Spirit. That’s a pattern for all future believers/disciples. We cannot participate in or fulfill the Great Commission under our own power (or at least we should not attempt to do so). Third, the Ascension. In the near future we will have an entire sermon devoted to the Ascension, so I’ll save thoughts on that for later...but I will give a short preview (because I just can’t help myself). If you look at Daniel 7:13-15 (a passage often misunderstood as referring to the second coming) is a picture from a particular vantage point of the Ascension.

- Q.** There is a curious little line in this chapter, “...they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement...” (24:41 NIV). Describe a time when you experienced something that was “too good to be true”.
- Q.** If someone were to ask you how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and promises, what passages in the OT would you point them to? (Or, do you have a personal favorite OT passage that points to Jesus?)
- Q.** Did you grow up in a church, or ever attend a church, where they “passed the peace”? Describe your experience. (Was it meaningful/significant? Just a thing they did that you didn’t really understand or find important? Etc.)
- Q.** “Peace” is a popular concept/idea/vision. How would you define “peace”? What/how does Jesus and His Kingdom contribute uniquely to our understanding of peace? Do you think peace is possible without Jesus? (Explain).
- Q.** Explain, in your own words, why Jesus actually being incarnate (in the flesh), truly physical is important. What is at stake?
- Q.** Is it possible to be a Church (or for that matter, much of a Christian) without embracing the Great Commission? Explain. (**Note, the correct answer is NO.**)
- Q.** How are you/we continuing the witness bearing, gospel preaching in our lives, individually and communally?
- Q.** In light of your present context and circumstances, where is your current “mission field”? (Perhaps share specific names of people in your life whom you are trying to be a witness to and share the gospel with. Perhaps pray together as a Home Group for these people.)
- Q.** Describe your relationship with the Holy Spirit. How do you connect with Him? How have you experienced His work and empowering in your life? How have you seen/observed it within your church community?