

One degree of separation ~ *The Rev. Dr. Jay Koyle*

People who claim the *Greeting of Peace* disturbs their worship worry me. They above all need their worship disrupted. I am equally concerned by folks who treat *the Peace* like a foreshadowing of the coffee hour, running around to chitchat with their favourite friends as if it is liturgical intermission.

Those at both of these extremes miss the deep significance of this simple, but profound ritual action.

It is no accident that *the Peace* serves as both the seal of our intercessions and the gateway to sharing at the Table. The gesture puts flesh on the intimate connections implicit in our prayers for the world and our breaking of the one bread.

There is a play called *Six Degrees of Separation*, by John Guare. The playwright's title phrase describes the phenomenon of a shrinking world where any random two people can discover a link through a chain of six acquaintances. For example, you may have never met Boris in Moscow. But you know George, who knows Sharon, who knows Alex, who knows Bjorn, who knows Olga, who knows Boris.

It is a hauntingly compelling concept, the idea that no more than six "links" are needed to connect you to anyone else on the planet.

But did you know the Liturgy presumes a more fascinating notion? It is the perception Jesus reveals in the Gospels. We could call it "*One Degree of Separation*," the understanding that every Christian is linked to anyone else on Earth by no more than one other person.

You know and love Jesus, and Jesus knows and loves the rambunctious boy, the woman struggling to raise her family on a part-time income, the lonely man dying in a hospital bed, the girl rendered an orphan thanks to war.

The *Greeting of Peace* marks this connection. Indeed, it is a reminder of something even more profound!

Preacher Fred Craddock used to speak of his stint with a Vacation Bible School class years ago. The theme that summer was rooted in nature, the beauty of creation. So Craddock sent the children out to the fields and forest. "Find something that reminds you of God," he told them. "Then bring it back for show and tell."

One brought back a rock. "God is strong," she explained. Another displayed a flower because, after all, God is beautiful. One picked a handful of berries. "God feeds and cares for us," she said.

All made their presentations until one remained – the class troublemaker. He was standing off in the corner, holding the hand of his three-year old sister. Craddock figured the boy was having to baby-sit. "Come on over," he said. "Do you have anything?"

"Yes," came the response, with uncharacteristic shyness.

"Well," Craddock pressed, "what did you bring?"

The boy answered, "My sister."

Craddock admits he had forgotten the truth that boy perceived. Sometimes I do too. How about you?

I am glad Anglicans know how to revere their Prayer Books (whatever the vintage), their Bible, and the consecrated bread and wine upon the Table. But do you realize that sitting right next to you, there in the pew, is the image of God, the face of Jesus Christ?

We are created in God's image, and in Christ Jesus we are re-created in God's image.

Next time you reach out a hand and say "peace" to your neighbour across the aisle, do so with warmth and honour; reverence the presence of Christ. Before long you may see his face wherever you go!