St David’s Anglican church in Prestbury, Pietermaritzburg is one of those quintessentially South African contradictions. The parish church is surrounded by several hectares of lawn and, indigenous trees and is bordered on one side by a stream and the other by the Botanical gardens. The other two sides are bordered by a busy, noisy road – a taxi route into the city - and a set of shops selling everything from computer parts to (we suspect) illegally distilled liquor. The church grounds are used by local boys as a soccer pitch, Escom workers who need a lunch venue, teenage lovers who seek a romantic venue and local men of the road who need a place to sleep. The Sunday congregation is as diverse. Refugees from Zimbabwe and the DRC sit alongside white families who have lived in the area for decades and black families who have only moved to the area since the end of apartheid. Indian women in saris and Zulu girls in beads rub shoulders on Heritage Day. The wonder of it all is that this is one of the warmest, most welcoming congregations I have ever come across. Everyone is welcome: noisy babies, retired clergy, people who have no paid work.

It was this gloriously rich congregation that decided to take up the Anglican Communion Lenten Bible Study *And it was good*. We met once a week for five weeks in three different groups. Each group had its own dynamic, but the pattern overall was the same: We started by listening to a piece of music (for example Arvo Part’s Fur Alina, Erik Satie’s “Lent” from his Veritables Preludes, Psalm 104). Then we would read aloud the first of the Biblical passages suggested. Sometimes we heard two or three different versions of the text. Then we discussed the text (before looking at the study notes provided). Sometimes there was some additional information provided on the passage. Then we would move onto the next passage. Sometimes we read the “Notes from around the Communion”, but more often than not we did not get that far and participants were invited to read these notes for themselves. Each week we had the beautiful colour pictures which come with the course material displayed on the wall through the Bible study.

Before Lent a group of worship leaders – lay minsters, musicians, Sunday School teachers and clergy – met to plan the Sunday worship for Lent. We discerned a clear thread running through the readings – namely the theme of Covenant. So we decided to follow the theme of Covenant and creation. The first Sunday of Lent included a reading from Genesis 9 (the covenant with Noah in the rainbow). Following this lead, we made a rainbow which covered the front of the altar. Each Sunday during Lent we had the children strip off one of the colours, so that by Good Friday, only the gray background was left. On Easter day we “restored” the rainbow in all its colours. On that morning, the servers did not wear their usual robes, but instead they each wore T shirts in the colours of the rainbow. Our opening song for Easter morning– Graham Kendrik’s “First Light” - picked up the theme of creation and the hope of us all.

First light is upon our faces,
first light of the morning sun,
first sight of a new creation,
first hour of the age to come.