

Barre Congregational Church

August 14, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Tenth Sunday after Pentecost ~

“Did Jesus just say He came to bring Division?”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com and Facebook page.

Scripture Reading: Luke 12 v 49 - 46

I. Introduction:

We have all been sitting around a fire, whether it is a bonfire outside in the cooler fall or chilly winter evenings, or in front of a fireplace when it feels so cozy with a cup of hot chocolate or cider. Coming in from the cold into a home with a fireplace is awesome and huddling outside around a bonfire brings one together in a wonderful way. We have also seen how fires can be a destructive force and destroy landscapes and homes with so much devastation and trauma for those affected by it. Fire can be dangerous if one is not on the watch out or careful. Fire is quite often referred to in the Bible as something negative. In Luke 3 v 9 we read about trees that will be cut down and thrown into the fire, and in Luke 17 v 29, referring to Lot in the Old Testament, fire rained down to destroy Sodom and Gomorra for their iniquities. In our passage Jesus talks about fire in a cautionary and dangerous way. Let us have a look.

II. Fire and Division

Jesus says in verse 49, “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.” He uses fire as a metaphor of danger, not because He will cause real fires to break out but refers to a destructive judgment that separates evil from good. Jesus’ message feels quite urgent, as He expresses His wish that the fire had been kindled already, but then tells the crowd that the time is not right, because He still needs to go to Jerusalem, where He will suffer, be rejected and die on the cross. He then asks them whether they thought He came to bring peace! No, I came to bring division, instead! Those who think He came to bring peace, are mistaken, because His message is not a unifying message that is appreciated by everyone. His message means making choices in loving the neighbor as

myself and sacrificing my life for the other. His message to them as a Messiah of peace implies that a lot of weeds need to be removed from their lives, cleaning out the bad stuff, the carelessness towards the poor, and being responsible in their giving and compassion as He had been teaching them. His teachings also involved those in power who need to change their ways. They all need to know what it involves following Him.

Jesus distinguishes between those who listen to His teaching and taking it in, and those who reject it. To preach the Gospel message therefore creates lots of anxiety, disarray and unhappiness, a dis-ease about being confronted with choices that do not feel very comfortable. A fire is therefore needed to cleanse out the destructive behaviors which humanity is bringing upon themselves.

Jesus then reminds the crowd about their skills of being able to read the weather patterns so accurately, but they have no idea how to recognize God's intervention in their lives, and to read the signs of God speaking to them. His message is in essence a message about the end that comes without warning, and about the importance to be ready for when that time comes. It is not wise to be unprepared, because the end can come at any time.

III. Conclusion

We do not know when the end will come, but there are certainly some signs that something is happening that makes life a little more vulnerable these days. Whether this is an indication of the end time, is not clear, because we do not know when that will be. Jesus's message is, be prepared. He knows who is ready and who is not, who listens to His message and who does not, who accepts the grace of God and salvation that is offered for eternal life. He is making a distinction between good and bad, and He calls upon the crowd to be faithful, and to serve God tirelessly, and be watchful. He then brings a warning to the most basic unit in society, the family unit, that place which we call our comfort zone with the ones we love. The choice we make for or against this message of salvation, following God's will in our lives, can be received differently in our families. For some God is central in their lives, and for others, God is perceived as some phenomenon that does not need their following. There are many different responses to the Christ message. Our society has many responses. The problems we face daily, and which quite often are so difficult for us to

overcome, need a response that is healing and redeeming. Those problems require so much of God's presence and redemptive work. Jesus is calling upon the crowd then and now, to make sure we recognize the power of God's intervention, despite the divisions we may experience even in our own families. We have a choice to make for our own lives, and in making that choice we also become instruments of that message, which is a message of peace, but because of the diverse response to it, becomes a message of division. Hold on though, He says, and live a life of peace and compassion, and be ready for when the end comes.

We here at Barre have a wonderful opportunity to continue our calling to love and serve one another, and to respond to this call of Christ to live out His message and to be instruments of peace in a world fraught with divisiveness, and in our families where there are sometimes situations that require a Christ presence. May God help us to continue to say, yes Lord. We are here to love and to serve and to be in union with you and one another. May God have mercy on us and hold back that fire so we can continue our message of peace and harmony. Amen