

October 15, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost~

“May our Faith in God Lead us into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

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

Scripture Reading: Matthew 22 v 1-14 and Philippians 4 v 8-9

1. Introduction:

Today is the beginning of our Stewardship Campaign here at Barre Congregational Church, and what an amazing opportunity we have as a congregation to embark on something so important, because it has to do with our personal relationship with God, with our church, and how we believe God is calling us to serve, and to give of our time and our resources. This morning we will explore how our faith can be strengthened as we serve God and our community here in Barre.

It is also a week now that the world has been shaken by events in Israel/Gaza and how for me personally it presents an existential crisis of my own faith as a Pastor and a follower of Christ, and as a mediator who has worked with more than a hundred Israelis and Palestinians a number of years ago for a period of five years, helping them as people of faith and as people separated through their conflict, to come together to talk, to hear from one another, and to find some common ground and a way forward for themselves. I am left with so many questions and concerns for those whom I worked with, who are in a place of danger, and I am also left with so many questions about how we got to this place as human beings, and where shall my faith and my help come from during a time like this. I wanted this to be out there with you today, because as a Pastor and a follower of Christ I cannot stand here today imagining that things are happening in a vacuum over there. They are not, in fact the world is now involved in this horrific situation there as it has been in the Ukraine / Russian conflict, and elsewhere.

So, my question to you is, “How is your world today, how is your faith this morning? How secure are you in your faith in your own life, your own space and in our community, here at

church and beyond? What are you thinking about, and what are your cries unto God? What are your issues that you are worried about, and what do you need from God, for you to have peace of mind as you yourself may be struggling with your own faith?

2. Remain steadfast in your faith.

Our passage in Philippians comes from the lips of Paul and Timothy to the congregation in Philippi, in which they exhort the members there to remain steadfast in their faith and to imitate the humility of Christ. In these final verses they encourage the congregation to, despite persecution, and him being in prison, their lives as Christians should be consistent with the truth of God. Think about what is true and honorable, what is just and pure, what is pleasing and commendable. If they do these things, the God of peace will be with them. This is a message about faith and trust in God on a consistent basis, no matter what happens around them. It is a message that helps them refocus their concerns by lifting their eyes to the heavens and trusting God to be their help, their companion, their strength. This God will fill them with the strength they do not have themselves.

This and other letters to various congregations by Paul and others were always meant to not water down the issues they were dealing with, but to name them and face them together, to be honest about their struggles and to humbly come together in sharing and supporting one another. Paul knew that faith in God can only be strengthened when the congregation understood and remembered the core of their existence, and that is their belief in Christ the Lord, who died and rose again, and Whose Holy Spirit is with them to give them wisdom and guidance in their everyday struggles. By praying together and studying scriptures together their faith would be built up, so they would not waver during times of distress.

3. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a Wedding Banquet:

This is the point of Jesus too when He tells the parable of the wedding banquet to those standing around including the Chief Priests and the Rabbis. He says, The Kingdom of heaven is like a King who prepared a wedding banquet for his son, and who invited some guests like we would today. The guests included the wealthy and the privileged, those who owned fields and businesses who disregarded the invitation to the wedding banquet twice, even when He sent the

messengers a second time to remind them about the food that has been prepared. Instead, they went off doing their own thing, going to their field, and doing their business. They did not just refuse to come and shame the king, but they also attacked and killed the messengers who are reminding them of the banquet. Jesus is telling this parable to make a comparison between God as the King who sends the prophets of old, to the people of Israel, appealing to them to listen to the message they have from Yahweh. We are aware that there are prophets who were mistreated and persecuted, told to be quiet, and some of them endured physical violence, and were killed. When the first group refused to come, He then extended the invitation to ordinary people. They included everyone, good and bad, people from different backgrounds to come and join in this very special wedding banquet. They accepted the invitation and filled the wedding hall and enjoyed the wonderful meal and company.

4. Conclusion:

This parable is a call to us as followers of Christ, during this Stewardship Campaign, to understand what the wedding banquet is all about. It is about the life of faith in a Living God who wants us to live a life obedient to the will of God, filled with strength and hope for today and tomorrow. We are called to live and serve our God, our church, our community, and this world, so that this world will be a better place to live in until the day when Christ returns, and we will stand before God to answer and to enter the Kingdom of heaven. May God strengthen our faith during times of uncertainty and make things clearer to us when we are in doubt. May this message be a reminder to us that God is alive, and that in faith we can hold onto that promise as we pray and as we wait for God's answer. God is also calling us and this world to repent from our sins, and to live according to God's will, to love, not hate, to be at peace, not war and violence, to be open and accepting of all others, because we are all God's children. May God assist us here in Barre to serve in the way Christ desires us to serve, and may God assist us during this month to examine ourselves and discern what God desires from us. May the message of Paul and Timothy also strengthen us on our journey. Amen.