

Barre Congregational Church

October 16, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, and** ~

“Loving Together”

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

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13 v 4-7 and John 15 v 1-15

I. Introduction:

This is our second Stewardship Sunday, and we continue to focus on the deepening of our relationship with and commitment to God, and with one another. It is a beautiful time of year here in New England, where we bask in the spectacular fall colors, and enjoy the cooler mornings and warm glow of the midday sun. I hear people talk about apple picking, drinking hot cider and eating pumpkin pies, and at our house we enjoy the aroma of delicious squash baking in the oven, filled with butter and maple syrup and cinnamon. It is the time of year where we enjoy sitting indoors around the fireplace or outdoors around bonfires (where they are legal)! Being together with the ones we love, family, friends, and neighbors in such a cozy environment and time of year, feels so good.

II. Jesus' commandment of love

I can only imagine how beautiful it must have been for Jesus and His disciples to spend time together, sitting around their own fire, eating freshly grilled fish and bread, talking about their experiences of the day, and the disciples listening to Jesus' teachings. As always, the core of Jesus' message to His disciples and those who followed and challenged Him is the commandment of love for God and their neighbor as they love themselves. In our passage here in John 15, He emphasizes the following: “Love each other as I have loved you”. He then talks about Him laying down His life for His friends. Yes, they are His friends, not slaves, who would not be treated as equals, but friends with whom one spends precious times with, like they did with Him. Because of that precious relationship, there was no question that He would lay down His life for them. And so, the command to love each other as He loved them comes with that added expectation that they would lay down their lives for their friends. Now, whether He meant that literally, we don't know, but it certainly speaks about a deep friendship, filled with love and

care. It is the kind of love that binds them together, so that whatever happens they could count on each other, lean on one another, and sacrifice themselves for the other. This love, He says will fill them with complete joy, a sign of a peaceful and loving existence with one another.

III. Paul on the subject of love

Following his conversation in 1 Corinthians 12 on the spiritual gifts of each member in the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul then tells them here in Chapter 13 about the most important gift they have been given, which is love. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Paul Gardner talks about love as follows, “It is a biblical path that will bring the Christian to a proper maturity as a spiritual person. It will produce a person who is able to discern between boasting in the Lord and in oneself.” He continues to talk about this path of love as a path of humility, which may lead to rejection and sacrifice. For him, spiritual people are marked by their love rather than their grace-gifts. The Apostle Paul does not have a problem with the grace-gifts, but how the gifts and knowledge function among the Christians. Are their behaviors driven by the love they have inside of them, or by their own pride and self-interests. To speak in tongues, for example without love, means to be noisy, without the deeper feeling of care and compassion.

Love on the other hand, he says, is a way of being with others. He described it as forbearing, meaning being patient, and putting up with others’ weaknesses; it is kind, meaning living out the compassion and mercy and forgiveness of God, it does not envy, or boast, or is not puffed up, meaning it is not status oriented, or rude, but it puts up with a lot, like Christ did, and God with the Israelites and with us. It believes all things, meaning it never loses faith and hope. Love endures always, meaning it has everything the Christian needs to live a life pleasing to God, and to be at peace.

IV. Conclusion:

To truly enjoy the beautiful things in life together, presupposes that one wants to be with the other, sharing those beautiful experiences together. It also means that in good times and bad times, the presence with those close to us is important and meaningful. Loving together means to seek God’s help to be like Christ in and through all circumstances with those in our homes, at work and outside in the community, at peace and filled with joy. Loving together in our church setting, means to seek this excellent way that Paul offers the Corinthians, a Godly love which is

good for our souls, and gives us a deep feeling of fulfilment, and peace. May God help us to reflect on this during this month of stewardship, and fill us with this deep love as we recommit ourselves to God and one another. Amen