

Barre Congregational Church

August 21, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost ~

“Be Strong in the Lord”

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

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1 v 3-14

I. Introduction:

How lovely it is to receive a card or email, or even a handwritten letter from someone wishing us a happy birthday, anniversary, or well wishes for a recovery. Receiving any of these pieces of communication can lift one’s spirits tremendously. I cherish the letters and cards I have received from my mother, siblings, and friends in South Africa, which I keep in a ring binder, and look at from time to time. I also enjoy the cards I receive from church members, and I know that we do send cards out to our church family when they go through something challenging. Sometimes it is just a phone call that makes our day. Some of you have loved ones far away as well, and so, you know that special feeling a phone call, and in these days, face time, Whatsapp or other means of communication can mean to us. So, let’s have a look at Paul’s letter to the Colossians here in this first chapter.

II. A Spiritual letter of Thanksgiving and Continued prayer

Paul, the father of these early churches in Asia Minor writes to one of the churches in Colossae. With his associate, Timothy, he greets them and then he thanks God for them, and for how well they were doing. He also shares with them a prayer he had been praying for them as a community of faith.

In verses 3-8 we see him thanking God for this faith community, for their faith in Christ and their love for their fellow believers. It is a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God, filled with awe, because he knew that to start a church, and to build it up, was no small feat. He is now in touch with them, following up on the message he received from Epaphras, who was the founder of this church. He wants to make sure they know that he values them and keeps them in his prayers. In verse 9 he shares with them how he and Timothy pray

unceasingly for them. It is important to note, that for Paul prayer was fundamental to the building up and support of the church. He also thanks God for the faith they have developed as the gospel was bearing fruit and growing within them, as it has done so in the rest of the world. He also is grateful to God for the love they have in the Spirit because it is that agape love that seeps through everything the Christian is, becomes, and lives out.

In and through this prayer we learn how Paul is creating a household where the members are more than just human beings coming to serve, but where they have become, as described by David Pao in the Commentary of Colossians and Philemon, “a new humanity related to one another through their relationship to Christ”. They have been filled with the love of the Holy Spirit and it shows in all they are and do. Pao continues by saying that “the interrelationship among believers must not be at the expense of the relationship with God”. God works through them and that is key for them as a community of faith.

“We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you ...”, Paul says. They pray and they ask, which is what we often do ourselves, right? We pray for divine help, and then we ask, and go into the details of what we need from God. His prayer is intended to build them up, to bring them to the point of bearing fruit, and the more fruit they bear, the stronger they become. Then he becomes more specific in his ask...Firstly, it is a prayer for them to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, wisdom that is different from what the world offers. This wisdom comes to them as a church collectively, and to them individually in the way God reveals Godself to them. Secondly, it is a prayer that the Colossians will live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing God in every way, bearing fruit, growing in the spiritual knowledge, and being strengthened with the glorious and mighty power of God, for the endurance and patience they will need. What a powerful prayer for this church. To know someone is praying like this for a church, is awesome, because it covers everything that the church and all individuals need to sustain themselves.

What he is saying here in simple language is for them to do Bible study so they can understand the will of God, to have prayer meetings so they can be strengthened with God’s

power, to serve God and the community and be an example to others, pleasing God, and be a light to the world.

III. Conclusion

To write a letter, a card, or email to someone is a gift the other person is receiving, something special and memorable, which they will treasure. People remember when we reach out, and when we tell them we pray for them they will remember that too. We all need to be reached out to. We all need the care and support, and we all need prayers in our lives. The church is an incredible place to do these things, to be practical, and come together in prayer and studying the scriptures together. In all this we are reminded that it is pleasing to God to do these things with the love of God working in and through us. May God bless us on our individual journeys and as a church as we do our letter and card writing, and the phone calls and the emails. In doing these things, we are giving a gift to others they can never lose, the love and care coming from the heart. In and through these gifts we all become strong in the Lord. Amen!