

October 22, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Twenty first Sunday after Pentecost~

“Let there be peace on earth.”

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

Scripture Reading: John 14 v 23 -27 and Galatians 5 v 16 -26

1. Introduction:

Our world is filled with people coming from different homes with different upbringings, and backgrounds. In our own homes, here in Barre and beyond we are not all the same. We all have different personalities, needs and desires and ways of dealing with different situations, at home, at school and at work. With those differences come different ways of dealing with difficult situations and conflicts. Sometimes it is easy to make peace, and other times not. Growing up with my seven other siblings, like in many of our homes, we were bound to be in conflict with each other, but we had to get over it, because my mother always encouraged us to make peace. Her call for peace in our home will remain with me forever, as she has always had a strong sense of what peace truly means. For her, it is about what is right and what is wrong, and she will convey that truth, and then encourage us to create a place to live in peace. For me, that foundation was so important as it shaped me and helped me greatly as a pastor, and in my work in peacebuilding and reconciliation in various parts of the world. So, while our homes can be a place of peace and conflict, so is our world. So, what is Jesus and Paul’s counsel for us?

2. My peace I give you, says Christ:

When the peace of God, of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit enters the hearts and minds of individuals, everything changes. The power of the peace of God is beyond comprehension for the individual. Why is the peace of God so different from the peace we know as individuals and the peace we have among ourselves? The answer lies in the peace that comes from God, which is a perfect peace. Jesus says in John 14 v 27, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” His peace has the capacity to drive out the fears and anxiety

and troubles and the anger we feel inside as human beings, and makes its home inside our hearts, to calm us down and to fill the spaces of our hearts with the love of God that is a perfect love. It is a peace that gives us rest, like the peace in the early morning before the birds wake up, like the stream flowing quietly across the stones and rocks, bringing quiet to the mind. It is a peace that comes not when we rely solely on ourselves to solve problems, but when we rely on the One who knows everything about the issue and asks from us to trust the Divine intervention and process as we pray. God wants to stand inside our lives, our homes, our work and everywhere we find ourselves, where problems emerge and bring us discomfort. God's presence IS what we need when we do not feel peace and comfort. The peace of God comes when we pray for God's assistance and then trust in God every step of the way.

Jesus lays the foundation for what is needed to receive and experience that peace. In response to Judas, who asked why He will show Himself only to the disciples and not to the world, Jesus responds, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." To receive and experience the peace of God means they have accepted God into their lives, and they are filled with love for God. The peace of God will then find its home in the place of love, love for God and love for the neighbor. That is the foundation for peace to flourish. Love one another as I have loved you. Love everyone, every human being, no matter who they are, from every culture and background. Love them, because if you love one another, there will be peace.

3. Life in the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit:

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is astonished by how quickly the Galatian church deserted their faith and salvation in Christ and returned to the belief in the obedience to the Old Testament Law, which sometimes in its punitive form does not fully assist them in their lives as followers of Christ. They must return to the belief in the Christ who saved him, Paul, when he was persecuting the Christians for what they believed. They must live under the grace of God and in love and bearing the fruit of the Spirit here in Chapter 5. To live by the Spirit means you will not gratify the desires of your sinful nature, which include things such as we see in verse 19ff, "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication,

impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." To live like this means to be at peace with everyone.

4. Conclusion – Let there be peace on earth:

What more do we need to know or hear to bring peace into this world today? We see an unpeaceful world playing in front of our eyes like a movie. We see anger and violence every day in this world, around us and beyond. There is road rage, unnecessary shootings, bullying of our kids, and more, and then there are poor and hungry people who cannot sleep at night, because they are worried where the next meal will come from. A serious and devastating human tragedy is occurring in the Middle East right now, and Jesus Christ would not be quiet about it. He would weep and He would speak up and He would get Himself in trouble. He wants us to follow Him and see what we can do about our human suffering around us and beyond. That is love in action so that peace can follow.

To bring peace to our own lives, our homes, our communities, and in this world, is a great endeavor, because to be at peace and bring peace is so countercultural to how life often can be. Many of us are so different from each other, and sometimes we cannot come together to understand each other and be at peace with one another. Maybe some of us will be inspired by the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, which in part reads as follows: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy." Christ is addressing that prayer by equipping us with the peace we need, and the fruits of the Spirit, to live and to be instruments of peace in a world that needs it so much. During this Stewardship month, we here at Barre Congregational Church, and all others have the opportunity to reflect and ask God to help us and to fill us with the Spirit of love and peace, so we can be instruments of peace in this world. Amen.