

Barre Congregational Church

November 27, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ First Sunday of Advent ~

“The people have seen a great light”

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

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 2 v 1-5 and 9 v 1-7

I. Introduction:

Here in the Northern hemisphere the days are getting shorter and colder. Soon we will experience snowy days, at times beautiful to walk in and at other times to watch its beauty through the window where inside will be warm and cozy. Everywhere we see festive decorations and twinkling lights brightening up the darkness of our shorter days and nights. Christmas trees are ready to be brought home, ready to be decorated with the sounds of Christmas melodies in the background. What a beautiful time of year, and what endless possibilities to lighten up the dark days of winter. But more, as the church, we will come together to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Greatest light for Christians all over the world.

So, we are gathered here today on this first Sunday of Advent, preparing our hearts and minds and homes for that day when we will say, Happy Christmas, and sing, “Joy to the World, the Lord has come!” What an anticipation of probably the most beautiful time of year in the life of the church, a time of celebration, and of light in the darkness.

II. The people have seen a Great light: the King of peace and light!

The words and vision of the prophet Isaiah in these two passages are about Yahweh’s grace and mercy over the Northern Kingdom, Israel and the Southern Kingdom, Judah. It describes a period of light, hope and joy that will come later on, a time not yet known to them in their despair but known to Yahweh who will bring them out of exile and liberate them from their oppressors. The description of the Mountain of the Lord in Chapter 2 is symbolic of how Jerusalem will become a beacon on Mount Zion, the Mountain of the Lord, restored from their iniquities, and a magnet to the nations of the world, as Walter

Brueggemann in his commentary on Isaiah, calls it. The word of God will become a guide and light to the nations, and this will be a period where Yahweh will end the wars and divisiveness. Nations will beat their swords into plowshares, into useful tools to be used for upbuilding, not destruction. There will be no more war, but peace will be established by the greatest peacemaker of all, Yahweh. Isaiah's prophecy in Chapter 2 v 5 ends with the words, "Come o House of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

In Chapter 9 we see the description of how Yahweh will end the brutality of war. It will be the end of the failed leadership of King Ahaz, and tremendous suffering, replaced by new leadership under King Hezekiah who will be an agent of peace and prosperity in the hand of Yahweh for the people of Judah. It will be the coming of Yahweh's vigorous light into the life of Judah, where there was no light, only despair. In verse 3 we see the incredible joy of liberation, growth, and prosperity. Yahweh makes this promise, and Yahweh will be in the center of this transformation.

Then, in verses 6 and 7, we see the joyous announcement of the birth of the Davidic King, a Son is born, and the government will now be on His shoulders, and He will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This King will be wise, and a great leader, with the Mighty powers of God, and His order and government will be that of a peaceful existence in contrast to the chaotic regime of Ahaz. This, according to Matthew 4 v 13-17, speaks to the fulfilment of the coming of the Messiah, Christ, the Lord. This King will be a King of peace and justice and righteousness, says verse 7, and the zeal of God will make that happen until the very end of time.

The people will shout with joy because they have seen a great light! They will be delivered from their oppressors, the Assyrians, and there will be a King who will bring peace to them, so they can live again and prosper again.

III. Conclusion:

This prophecy of Isaiah is about hope for renewal for the land of Judah, for Jerusalem. It is about the return from exile, and a new kingdom under Hezekiah then, but it is also about change and transformation, about peace in the future, a great light that the people will see,

the light of the Son of God, the Messiah. It is about a new dispensation in God's time where there will be peace and light and joy. Isaiah's poetic speech draws from the heart of God the words the people needed to hear. It is about God's intentions for them then and for the world now, in God's time, and therefore it is mysterious, and certain and powerful.

The peace of God is a peace that we must also hope for, for us in this world today. We have the privilege as a congregation, as the church in the world, to celebrate Christmas, remembering the birth of the Son of God, the One who brings peace and wisdom, who wants to help govern the nations from a place of love. He is from God, the Mighty God. He is the Prince of Peace. So here we have an opportunity in this 21st century to learn lessons from Jerusalem, from Israel and Judah, to not stray from the love that God wants us to have for one another, the love that overcomes everything, and a love that strives towards justice and righteousness for all people. It is a love that helps us see one another as sisters and brothers, a love that helps leaders lead not the way Ahaz led, but the way God wants them to lead, away from division, hate and violence, war, and corruption; to lead with love and wisdom and compassion and peace. During this advent season we are encouraged to prepare our hearts, to follow the Great Light that came into this world to light our hearts, like a tree being lit with little bulbs and electricity making things beautiful, delightful, and peaceful. May God help us see and follow that light always, so we will all say, we saw a great light, the Light of Christ whose birth we will celebrate soon. Amen