

Barre Congregational Church

December 4, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Second Sunday of Advent** ~

"The Kingdom of Heaven has come near!"

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

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11 v 1-10

I. Introduction:

There are many systems in place to regulate our lives...in our homes, our community organizations, our towns, and its various departments, such as the police, fire, and other important services. We have health care systems, school systems, life insurance, car insurance and much more, all meant to help us live smoothly, and meet our basic needs. We know that these systems are not always perfect; our families are not perfect, but we try our best. Our local town departments try their best to serve us, and yet they too are not perfect. For people to feel safe and happy and protected and good about life, there are things we all can do in our personal lives, and then there are things these organizations, and companies can do to meet the basic needs of people. Systems and organizations work well when there is a good vision, mission, good leadership, and a good culture that make people feel cared for. It is true for today, and it is true for many systems in the past, in history, including biblical times and in the history of the church.

II. The Shoot from the Jesse tree

Our passage describes very clearly and specifically this shoot that will sprout from the stump of the Jesse tree, to indicate a new dispensation, a future King who will bring a transformation in the life of Israel. There will be change and renewal after their suffering under the Assyrian regime. God will bring deliverance to them here in Chapter 11. Jesse, the father of David, is used here to indicate the line and the power of the Davidic Kingdom in the history of the people of Israel, and out of that family, a branch will sprout that will bear fruit. In verses 2 – 5 we see a description of the character of this King. First, the Spirit of God will be upon Him. This phrase is used in the Old Testament as to how God's Spirit

will rest on the Kings and prophets as they are embarking on the work they have been called to do. This King will receive wisdom, knowledge and understanding, and good judgment to rule according to God's will. He will have a fear of the Lord, and a deep commitment and respect for Yahweh, and His Kingdom will all be about God's will and glory on earth. All the characteristics of goodness, and wisdom and understanding of the needs of people, and how to deal with leaders and rulers and religious people, will be carried within this root of Jesse. Then in verse 4 it talks about how He will rule. He will be fair, and He will be just, and righteousness will be His armor. He will make good decisions for the poor of the earth, beyond just the people of Israel. He will speak with authority, the authority coming from Yahweh whose purpose on this earth is for every living being to feel loved and cared for, and Who meets the needs of the least of these.

In verses 6-9 we see a time where there will be peace, peace among the animal kingdom, and peace among the peoples of the earth, led by a child in verse 6. These are powerful images of a world and its systems we don't know yet; a world Israel did not know since the time of Adam and Eve. This will be a Kingdom of Heaven that has come near to us here on earth. This King, this Root of Jesse, for us as Christians is Christ the Lord, whose lineage goes back to the family line of David. When He was born, He ushered in this new peaceful dispensation we so aspire to in our own lives.

III. Peace is the will of God!

There are times in our lives when things are going well with us, our families, our loved ones, our work and in those systems, we talked about at the beginning. When things go well, there is peace of mind. There is relief, and there is hope and there is joy. When new leaders are elected and there are promises of good things to come, one has hope. But we know that the joys and peace we feel, and experience can be temporary. It comes and it goes, and at times are being replaced by conflicts, unsettling feelings, struggles and strife that lead to the absence of peace of mind. That is not what God intended for Israel, and for us. God's intentions for us are to live in peace, and to feel at peace within, to embrace and internalize these images we see in Isaiah 11 v 6-9, of a Kingdom at peace with itself.

IV. Conclusion

And so, I pray that while we may be on different continents this Christmas season, you here and me in South Africa, we will be connected by this saturation of God's knowledge and God's peace and God's blessings, and that we will worship God here at Barre Congregational Church, and there at Wellington Uniting Reformed Church, and look towards the Christ Child in new ways, and ask Him, and ask God, what can I do to bring peace where I live, where I work, where I go to school, where I find myself? How can each one of us be partners with Christ in bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to bear in this world. I pray for everyone in our congregation, with your unique presence and gifts, that you will feel that this is your space to be, to give and receive the love of God, to find comfort and wisdom from what is being given here. May God be with you, till we meet again in the new year! Merry Christmas.