

Barre Congregational Church

December 13, 2020: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Third Sunday of Advent~

“Our God of Good News and Righteousness”

(Our services can be watched on the church website at www.barrechurch.com and Facebook page)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 61 v 1-4 and 8-11

I. Introduction:

Isn't it wonderful to receive good news, especially if it comes unexpected? Hearing about the birth of a baby is such beautiful news, especially if it is happening in our own families or loved ones close to us. Hearing about a new job, especially if one had been unemployed for a while, is extraordinary news. Having passed one's exams is probably one of the more exciting pieces of news one can hear, and then there is the new puppy or pet that enters a home, and changes everything. There are many things that happen, which bring good news to us, and in today's situation, any piece of good news is certainly welcomed right?

II. The God of Good News and Righteousness

This Chapter of Isaiah is part of a body of poetic writings that speak about the challenges of the people of Israel, their struggles, and their hopes in Yahweh's interventions. The chapter is divided into different sections starting in verses 1 – 7 with an identified human actor, who seems to be a person of authority, and who brings the good news about the restoration of Judah after their suffering in exile. In verses 8-9 God enters the picture by declaring God's love for and commitment to justice, and then in verses 10-11 the human representative continues in great joy about Yahweh clothing him with righteousness, as well as filling the community with righteousness and praise.

This individual has been blessed with the Spirit of Yahweh, who came over him, and anointed him to preach good news, which involved the healing of the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to comfort

those who mourn, and more. This proclamation comes from a deep understanding of the suffering of the people of Judah and speaks about a powerful ministry to the marginalized and their restoration to their full capabilities. This passage also speaks about the year of the Lord, with reference to Leviticus 25, which deals with the economic restoration of those who lost their land and properties. This passage is God's way of letting the people of Judah know that their emotional and physical and economic suffering will come to an end. God will see to it that their life of poverty and powerlessness and despair will be transformed by this good news of change that will be manifested in their lives, and in their communities.

We then see God entering the scene in verse 8 – 9, declaring God's love for justice and hatred of robbery and iniquity. I hate to see my people suffer. I will change their circumstances from mourning to gladness, from ashes to beauty, from despair to praise. I want my people to be in a good place and I want them to be happy, says the Lord.

And...the nations who did this to them will witness these changes. Those who did this will see the double blessing that comes from me, says the Lord. My people will be restored and strengthened like oaks of righteousness, and then they will rebuild their ruined cities. I am the Lord, who loves justice and righteousness.

In the final verses the individual comes back and is completely elated by the salvation he received from Yahweh, and the commitment of Yahweh to the people of Judah. Out of the ashes and despairs comes their justification, and their complete healing and restoration.

III. God in Jesus Christ continues to bring the Good news and a message of righteousness.

While this text in Isaiah 61 verses 1-4 does not refer to Christ, the Messiah, but rather to the restoration of the devastation of the people of Judah, we see Him reading from the scroll of Isaiah at the temple in Nazareth the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor", and so forth. Then He sat down and told those in the synagogue that the scripture is fulfilled in their hearing, meaning that through His coming this scripture has been fulfilled. That statement created so much anger among the people in the Synagogue, that they drove Him out of town. They

did that because of His claim to be the One sent by God to heal the world. God through Jesus Christ is therefore still committed to the restoration of the poor and the marginalized in the time of Jesus, and today. That is who God is from the time of Leviticus, throughout the Old Testament, a God of justice, who sees the plight of the poor, the victimized, the ones on the margins.

IV. Conclusion

During this period of Advent, let us take the time to reflect on the incredible love God has for humanity, for us. God's love is so immense, it challenges the forces of darkness then, and now. God still sees every injustice in this world and will not rest where there is unjust suffering. The celebration of the birth of Christ is a celebration of joy, as well as about the restoration of the pain and suffering of God's people. We as God's children can call out to this God of righteousness any time to bring an end to an injustice in our lives, and in this world. We can do that, knowing that God hears us, and wants to bring us peace and healing, and wants to bring us good news of change and transformation.

May God help each one of us to continue to believe that nothing is impossible with God in the face of the pain and suffering we experience and what we see around us.

Amen