

Barre Congregational Church

December 6, 2020: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Second Sunday of Advent**~

Communion Sunday

“The One who is more powerful than me”

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

Scripture Reading: Mark 1 verses 1-8

I. Introduction:

Many of us find ourselves in situations sometimes, where we must remove obstacles and deal with issues to make life easier, whether it is in our families, at work, with friends and neighbors. It is about ironing out problems and making straight paths that are somewhat overly crooked. We read in the Gospel of Mark about making a straight path for the Lord. Let us follow Mark for a bit and see what he means by that.

II. The call to the wilderness

These first few verses in the Gospel of Mark create for us a connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament, with reference to the prophet Isaiah in the second and third verses where it reads, “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way. A voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him” It ushers in a new dispensation created by God. This is a wilderness setting, which is a message to the people of Israel to come back to the place where God wants to meet them. It is a place to be confronted with a message of repentance and to look towards redemption in Jesus the Christ. The person who initiates this call with his voice crying in the wilderness is John the Baptist, who believes he himself is unimportant, and that his message and baptism point to the One who is still to come, who is more powerful than him.

According to Herman Ridderbos in “The Coming of the Kingdom”, the people would come to be baptized by John the Baptist, and confess their sins, but their sins would not be forgiven through his baptism, instead, this was merely an opportunity for them to actively turn away from their

wrongdoings, and receive a message of hope in the One who would offer His forgiveness and salvation to them, the One who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ.

John is instrumental in introducing a new world order, a period of grace. His baptism would be a symbolic act of helping the people of Israel letting go of the old and allowing the new life in Christ to become part of them. They needed to straighten their paths for the Lord to do the work in their lives. They had to remove the obstacles in His way for Him to do what He needed to do. Mark talks about the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a period of joyful tidings, a period about change and transformation, authored and enacted by God, whose interest, and concern is about the saving of God's people from destruction.

III. He is more powerful than me, says John the Baptist

To be redeemed from their sins, they needed to reveal their sins to someone else who would look them into the eyes without judgment; someone who would be instrumental in the cleansing and redeeming process in their lives and give them new hope. This person would have the supreme dignity and power, says William Lane in his commentary on Mark, to transform their lives. That would be Jesus Christ, the Messiah, not be John, who would merely perform the act of the physical baptism, to symbolize the confessions of their sins, whereas the Messiah would impart the divine grace upon them, forgive them and offer their salvation. The Messiah would be filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and be the direct link to God, and be God on earth, teaching, guiding, forgiving.

John the Baptist would be imprisoned, we read. The Messiah would be tempted in the wilderness by satan, overcome those temptations, and begin the ministry of healing and driving out of evil spirits, and create a group of people around Him who would carry forth the work of God. His power would be witnessed and experienced by many who followed Him.

IV. The Power of Advent and Christmas

This introduction of Mark speaks to the power of Advent and Christmas. It reveals the intent of God to restore God's people to their original relationship with God. It is a divine power beyond all forces that want to destroy, a power that wants to restore and heal and bring people together

in Christ, in the church and with one another in their families, communities; and it is a power that wants to heal nations and the world from destruction.

Christmas is therefore a time to celebrate this powerful Child of God, who is such a mystery to us, but is so very real in our lives. Advent is a time to reflect on our imperfect lives in the face of our perfect Messiah who wants to take all our sins and weaknesses and transform our lives in loving service to God and one another.

We, and the whole world are called into the wilderness also, where we must face ourselves, our hearts and our minds and our actions, where we confess our sins and seek redemption from our powerful Lord and Saviour. We are called to straighten the path for the Lord's work in us!

May God help us to humbly seek forgiveness and remove the obstacles in our way that prevent us from really experiencing the amazing grace of God in our lives. May we be open to receive the blessing of the Son and the Holy Spirit in our lives every day. May we experience the power of love and joy in our lives as we look forward to celebrating Christmas together!

Amen