

Barre Congregational Church

May 9, 2021: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Sixth Sunday of Easter ~

Mother's Day

"I have Called You Friends"

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

Scripture Reading: John 15 v 9-17

I. Introduction:

Many of us may remember a teacher whom we loved in elementary or high school, and who made our lives easier as we were trying to get through our school years. We also have Sunday school teachers who have made an impact on our lives. I remember one elementary school teacher who made me cry so much when my parents moved from Kenhardt, my birthplace to the City of Cape Town. She was a good teacher and she made us all feel special, and at that age I could not believe that I would not see her again. I went off and had several other individuals, who have shaped my life in different ways; my pastor in my hometown in Wellington who taught me so much about church life, and my professor in Seminary who made me feel included as the only woman finding her way among all her male colleagues, who helped me find my voice.

We also had friends, and maybe still do, who have been there for us and with us through the ups and downs of life. All these individuals may not realize how much their love, their support, and the lessons we learnt from them have shaped our lives.

In our passage, we encounter Jesus where He introduces Himself as a friend to His disciples and calls them His friends. Let us have a look what that means for them and for us.

II. I have Called You Friends

Jesus continues His conversation with His disciples focusing on the theme of abiding or remaining in Him. The previous passage, which we focused on last week, laid out for the disciples how important it is to remain in Him, the Vine, and bear fruit; and now He is urging them to remain in His love, in the way he remains in God's love. The key here is His call to them to be in a mutual relationship with Him, to never leave, but to remain in Him. There are benefits to this relationship, which they need to remember as they go forth in spreading the Good News to the nations, while He will return to God.

This mutual relationship between Him and the disciples is described as a friendship. No, they are not His slaves or servants, He says, because a servant or a slave does not know the business of the master or employer. There is no real intimate relationship between them

either. It is different between Jesus and His disciples. The friendship He has with them, is a gift He offers them, and it flows from the love He has for them, the love that made Him give His life for them on the cross. They did not choose Him as many others would choose the Rabbi they would follow as was the practice; instead, He chose them. He has taught and given them everything they needed, everything He received from God. They therefore are equipped to go and bear fruit that will last, and therefore He appoints them to the precious task of sharing with the world what they received from Him.

III. Keep my commands.

This friendship is at its core based in a deep divine love that is compassionate and caring, but a love that also required obedience from them, obedience to keep His commandment of loving one another as He loved them and how He kept the commandments given to Him by God. This love of neighbor as thyself, is also found in the Mosaic Law, but this love Jesus is describing is more than the love in the Mosaic law. His is a love that carries with it something new, the gift of a person, the Messiah, who journeyed with them, who cared for them deeply, who transformed their lives and gave them inner peace and joy. Through His love and compassion, He healed the sick, cared for the poor, and reached out to those who were the outcast. If they keep that commandment of loving one another, as He loved them, in a sustained way, not breaking away from Him, they will receive an inner joy that is complete, that is awesome, that will remind them of Him always. He will be alive in them always. That is His promise.

IV. Conclusion

Those individuals who were and still are our friends, our teachers, did what they could to set us on the road, guide and shape us. We moved on from some of them, and maybe we stay in touch with others, and we carry within us that which we learned from them. Those individuals are special, and we will remember and cherish their impact on our lives.

This morning's passage reminds us that Christ's friendship, leadership, love, compassion and impact on our lives overshadow even the best of what those friends and teachers have meant to us. Why? Because He did not leave the disciples, and did not leave us completely; no, He is alive and through His Spirit He is still with us, inside of us, and available whenever we have a question, need to have a conversation, when we need to be comforted, and when we really need help in and through a difficult situation. He has called us His friends, and nothing could be more special than that!

That is the love He is talking about, which He gave His disciples and all of us who follow Him. It is also the love He urges us to have for one another. It is not just a request, but a command, that we love Him and love one another. We must bear fruit, the fruit of love and compassion, the same He has given us. Once we have that in us, live it out in a sustained way, that is when we will ask God whatever we need in His Name, and we will receive it. It is a love that forgives us for what we have done to others, and it is love that gives us peace and joy inside.

May God bless us today on this Mothers' Day, as we share our love with the women who have shared their lives and love with us. For those who do not have a mother or woman with you in the flesh anymore, may their memory be a blessing to you today. May God bless us all with this great gift of love from Christ and among one another. Amen