

Barre Congregational Church

January 12, 2021

A Special Message of Encouragement by Pastor Margaret Keyser, and lessons from Jeremiah 31 v 7 - 14

Grace and peace to all of you,

I hope all is well with you, your loved ones and those around you in your neighborhood and communities. The events this past week at the US Capitol must have left many of you on shaky ground, with concerns on how to move forward? I have seen, read, and heard many mixed emotions since the events, ranging from horror, to upset to sadness and especially anger at those who engaged in those activities which led to bloodshed, and the untimely death of several people. Arrests have been made, safety and security conversations are happening, and life does not look like it will be the same. We have become a nation, left vulnerable and anxious about what could happen next.

As a pastor, and mediator, I think it is important for us to come to terms with the fact that there is an immense stalemate right now in the country: on the one hand there is enormous anger at the political system and lawmakers about the outcome of the elections, and on the other hand anger at the president of the United States and those who believe the elections are rigged. There seems to be a deep distrust between and among people with different political beliefs, and this distrust has led to deep divisions and a sad situation. We are at a dangerous place, and I was wondering whether there could be the potential to pause and reset this button of a path that is leading us to an escalated situation where it will be so difficult to look at each other, see each other's humanity and be each other's keeper?

How do we find hope and healing out of this dire situation? This is not an easy question to answer, but a question we must ponder, as we as a nation face so many challenging situations, including the ongoing deaths and hospitalizations due to Covid-19. Last week's message focused on Jeremiah's prophecy of doom and destruction on the nations of Israel and Judah, as well as redemption for those who returned from the Babylonian exile, weeping, and praying, with God waiting to forgive, lead, guide and giving them a new day,

new favor. His message was a promise to Judah that they would be renewed and restored. That was a promise, but it also required from the nation to make a commitment to yield to God's desires for them. God wanted to give them hope and a new day, not because it would be easy, but because it would lead them to a place where they could find peace.

Growing up in South Africa, under apartheid, which divided our nation along racial lines, was not easy. I saw and experienced firsthand the damage that was done to our humanity, our relationships, and the trust that is so necessary to come together and heal. I also went through the period of transitioning from the old to the new South Africa, from estrangement to the coming together of people from different backgrounds and beliefs. South Africa is still on that journey, amidst many problems, but those changes left an imprint on a nation and on me, to keep on working to bring people together towards healing and reconciliation. It also helped me see God's ongoing liberating and redeeming hand in our history there.

You have had your own moments of change and redemption and healing in the US, you have had divisions, but also moments where you knew you had to come together. The September 11 tragedy was one moment where I witnessed how a nation can come together during so much pain and loss. What an extraordinary moment that was for me to witness...

I think Jeremiah's message points us to a moment of truth here in the US, where we must recognize that we need help, and allow God to enter our lives in ways that will restore and renew, according to God's will. I so hope and pray for us as a people, a world, a nation, a community, a church, families to be rescued and healed, to be humbled, and to engage in conversations and actions that will bring mutual understanding of our differences, heal ourselves and one another. May we embark prayerfully on such healing conversations in our communities and across this nation, and may God help us through this exceedingly difficult time.

May 2021 still give us an opportunity to be better, with God's help, mercy, and guidance.

God bless all of you. Amen

Pastor Margaret Keyser

