

Barre Congregational Church Outdoor Service

October 4, 2020: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost**~

“Let us make our requests known to God”

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4 v 1-7 and Luke 1 v 46 - 55

I. Introduction:

I remember a while ago, as I was standing at the kitchen sink, with a lot on my mind, and was wrestling with a particular situation, I remember being in conversation with God about it, like with a friend, but a friend with a Higher Power, and remember saying to God, You have the power to change this and (I remember being really emphatic about it) I ask that You bring about the change that is needed for a good outcome. I spoke from my heart, and with conviction, and handed the situation over to God. It was not long after I prayed that prayer that, almost frighteningly to my human senses, things started to change, and I remember allowing myself to observe patiently how things were unfolding for a different outcome. I am sure you know what I am talking about...those moments when we know things look too impossible to change by themselves, and when we lean on God for help, for an intervention, for guidance, that our God brings about the change that is beyond our imagination. Those are moments we need to remember when faced with challenging situations, because leaning on God in that way, brings us the inner peace that Paul is talking about here in Philippians Chapter 4.

II. Paul's instructions to the Philippian church leaders:

Paul writes to the church in Philippians during a challenging time. As in other churches during that time, they were facing threats from their opponents. There also seems to be some serious conflicts in the Philippian church, involving the two women leaders mentioned in verses 2, and the leaders were also concerned for Paul who was in prison. So, they were going through a lot, and Paul, as always, felt it necessary to write to those in leadership positions to have faith, be strong, and to believe in God who will help them through. He particularly wanted them to deal with their conflicts, and come together in unity, because of these other threats they were facing.

He gives them these important instructions, while he himself is going through a lot: First, he tells them to rejoice in the Lord always, meaning they must draw on the Christian joy that they already have inside of them, despite any circumstances. That inner joy has been created and given to them by Christ Who lives in them.

Secondly, he says, be gentle to everyone around you. Be at peace with those around you, treat them gently, and let their needs be first before yours. This is an important instruction linked to these words, “The Lord is near”, meaning, considering the Lord’s coming, your gentleness must be evident to all.

Thirdly, he tells them, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

III. Prayer and song from the mother of Jesus Christ:

Prayer is such a powerful and mysterious instrument given to us by God. It can look differently at different times. One can be in the kitchen, in the living room, the bedroom, in the shower, on a walk or in the car. Let us go back for a moment to Mary in Luke, Chapter 1, where she expresses her gratefulness to God for recognizing her humble state, and for using her to bring into the world the Son of Man, the Son of God. After she acknowledges her gratefulness to such an extraordinary experience in her life, she talks about God’s mercy over those who fear God, about the mighty arm of God that has brought down proud rulers from their thrones and has filled the hungry with good things. Mary was filled with the Spirit. She could highlight things that she saw, remembered, and brought it into her powerful and prayerful song to God.

IV. Conclusion: Let us make our requests known to God:

Prayer is powerful, it is personal, and it is mysterious. Through prayer we move the mighty arm of God, and when we do it collectively, I can only imagine how the good will of God would be manifested, especially in this day with its own challenges. Paul knew what he was talking about when he encouraged the Philippians to bring their prayer requests to God. Paul himself had gone through so much suffering himself, and through it all he knew

that only God could give him that inner peace to stay the course and hold onto the things that nurture the soul. The anxiety which the church in Philippi experienced had an antidote, and that is prayer, the prayer and conversation with God, which Mary shows us how to do.

So, whether we are at the kitchen sink, in the garden, wherever we are, maybe we are anxious this morning about an illness, finances, work place issues, or anything that leaves us with the feeling of upset and fear perhaps... let us pause and bring whatever we are concerned about to God. Let us speak, declare, have the conviction that God is with us. God sees the needs we have, the problems we face and wants to lead us through it. Let us bring all of that to God, let us leave it there, and let us receive the peace of God which transcends all understanding, as it guards our hearts and our minds.

Amen