

Barre Congregational Church

April 12, 2020: A Pastoral message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Easter Sunday** ~

“Do not be afraid... Christ is Risen!”

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28 v 1-10

Grace and peace to you, dear members and friends of the Barre Congregational Church, and happy Easter to you! I hope all is well with you and your loved ones. Today we bring you this written sermon, but we have also recorded our whole service, with beautiful music, which you will have received as a YouTube link via email this morning, and you can also watch it on the church's Facebook Page. I ask that we again join many Christians around the world today in prayer, asking for God's mercy and protection against the Coronavirus pandemic.

I. Introduction:

During the last number of weeks, we have reflected on the journey of Jesus to the cross, and on Good Friday we remembered His crucifixion. While we weren't able to be together for our usual Maundy Thursday service with its somber and beautiful atmosphere, I hope you've been able to take some time to reflect on this Holy week and its importance for us as Christians.

And so...thinking about the cross and the painful circumstances surrounding it, makes the resurrection story so incredibly powerful. We all know that the grave represents the end of our physical lives here on earth. It is about goodbyes, and tears and sorrow. It is about life without the person or persons. It is different, and it can be a devastating path for a while, but it can also bring new hope and new beginnings. The crucifixion of Christ was the kind of death that left an enormous hole in the lives of His disciples, and the crowds who got to know Him. It was awful, and shameful, and public, and difficult...gut-wrenching. That is why we celebrate the resurrection, because of its divine power that transcends death and destruction and brings us a message of life and hope.

II. The Empty tomb. He is not here...He is risen!

We read at the end of Mathew 27 how the Chief Priests and Pharisees brought their concerns to Pontius Pilate about this Jesus who told the people He will rise again on the third day. They asked Pilate for extra security, so they made sure they had guards at the tomb, as well as sealing the door of the tomb. There would be no way for Jesus to escape, or rise on the third day, as He told those around Him.

The Gospels share with us how, after the Sabbath, the women went early in the morning to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They were still crying and filled with sorrow. The burial was on Friday, but they wanted to follow their tradition, by anointing His Body. They obviously did not think about His words regarding the Resurrection, so when they arrived at the tomb, they found it was empty!

The women, as well as the disciples of Jesus left the crucifixion scene and went home wondering how they would continue their lives without Him. The death of Jesus seemed to be the end of their hopes. It was a time of loss and grief, an anti climax of the journey they've been experiencing with Him. It was also a dangerous time for them, because those who crucified their Lord, would also persecute them.

We see two brave women in this passage -- brave, because it was not part of the Jewish tradition for even one woman to walk around that early in the morning by herself. We see them encounter an angel at the scene, sitting on the stone, which he rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. They immediately realized that something was wrong. "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen from the dead, just as He said," said the angel. The women saw the empty tomb, and they realized something powerful had happened. This angel sitting here looked so bright and awesome and talked to them about their Jesus Who had risen, just as He said! Jesus' words came back to them as they tried to concentrate on the instructions of the angel to go and tell the disciples what happened, and that Jesus will meet them at Galilee.

The women left to bring this message of the angel to the disciples, when again, they hear, “Do not be afraid...” This time round it was the voice of Jesus, greeting them. They fell to His feet with joy and worshipped Him.

This occurrence on the third day is described in very dramatic terms: we see the description of a violent earthquake in connection with the appearance of the angel; we see the guards who were supposed to take care of the tomb, so afraid. They looked like dead men themselves, taking care of the living Christ!

III. Easter is about the power of God over death, of life and courage.

Easter is about an empty tomb, about the power of God to do powerful things. It is about the miraculous intervention of God Almighty, Whose power overcomes death and all tragedies, a power that breaks into the lives of humanity in ways we cannot even imagine. The disciples would not go back to their old lives. They would not become fishermen again; they would not go back to their lives and jobs they had. This empty tomb meant their lives would be changed in a completely different way.

The empty tomb is about life, not death! The Greek language used in the gospels for being risen, indicate that He arose, so they would not return to the life they were used to. He Himself will never die again. His is a new life in God, and their lives would be filled with the life and courage of the Holy Spirit to do different and great things...spreading the Good news of the Gospel to other parts of their world.

IV. Do not be afraid, because we have an Easter faith!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of our faith. So, when we confess our faith, we say we belief in God Almighty, Jesus Christ, the Risen Son, and the Holy Spirit. That means we declare that God is with us in the risen Son, in the church, with our families, and in this life with all its challenges! That means we do not have to be afraid, because we have our Living God in the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit with us always. This is the key to our life in Christ. This is the point of the Resurrection.

If we allow Christ to live and breathe and speak through us, we have the hope and knowledge that we will experience the power of Easter in our own lives, and in everything we go through right now. We will have Christ encouraging us to not be afraid, and we will have the Spirit of Christ who will pray with and through us.

And so, we have an Easter faith that is beyond our fears, our despair, our struggles. Our Easter faith has confidence in a God that has the potential far beyond our existing realities, far beyond death, with Whom all is possible, in life and death.

It is my prayer that all of us will remember that our faith is in the Christ, Who was risen by our Living God.

Have a blessed and safe Easter Sunday. Amen