

## **Barre Congregational Church**

April 7, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Second Sunday of Easter**~

***“I bring you peace, and forgiveness, Jesus says!”***

Our services can be found on our website at [www.barrechurch.com](http://www.barrechurch.com) and our Facebook page.

---

### **Scripture Reading: John 20 v 19 - 31**

#### **I. Introduction:**

The way we greet one another can take many forms. We say hi, how are you? Sometimes we may or may not get a response back, right? We also say, good morning, or good afternoon or evening, and we may add, it is good to see you. I do not recall anyone saying to me, “Peace be with you!” when they see me, and I am wondering whether you’ve had that experience? I do not talk that way myself but may send a written message beginning or ending in a greeting of peace and blessings. To greet someone with a peace greeting, means it must come from within oneself, and the self needs to represent the goodness of what peace is, and what it means to oneself and to another. To give peace means we must be at peace...

#### **II. “Peace be with you”, Jesus said!**

In the Gospel of John, on this Resurrection Day, we see Jesus entering the space of His disciples, like He did with Mary Magdalene and to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. He enters the room miraculously, where the disciples had locked themselves in, still afraid after Jesus' crucifixion just two days before. His appearance is marked by the words, “Peace be with you!”, and then He showed them His hands, which still bore the marks of the crucifixion. Leon Morris, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, asserts that He still brought them a message of peace after what they had done to Him! Peter denied Him, Judas betrayed Him, and the rest fled the scene. He continued to visit them and brought them a message of peace! What kind of person is He? This says a lot about Jesus’ understanding of peace, because while the peace greeting was a usual greeting during His time, it is unimaginable for someone who had gone through what He did, to return to those who abandoned Him during such a trying time and gruesome experience.

Earlier in John Chapter 14 v 27, Jesus describes the peace He gives His disciples. It is a peace not like the world gives, but a peace coming from inside Himself as the Son of God. It is a peace from inside His Being, a being of love, forgiveness, acceptance, and compassion. His full being is that of God, and He gives them that which belongs to God, not what the world gives, which is not a lasting peace. The peace He gives, overcomes any feeling of abandonment He must have felt when they left Him to die on His own on the cross. It is a peace from God in the middle of a violent experience He just had, but a violent experience that was overcome by the powerful and victorious resurrection of the Son of God by God Almighty!

### **III. “Forgive anyone for their sins”, He says!**

Jesus’ message of peace also carries with it a message of forgiveness, which He now gives to them by breathing upon them the Holy Spirit, so they could go and spread the good news about Him. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they would be at peace, and forgive everyone. Forgive anyone, He says. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Again, it is exceedingly difficult to comprehend how He could speak about forgiveness like this. The answer is in Himself, how He prayed for forgiveness for those who crucified Him as He was hanging on the cross! That speaks volumes of the being of the Son of God, and of Godself!

From the research I conducted, Jesus is giving the authority to the church to speak to those who come to seek forgiveness. The duty of the church is to proclaim forgiveness to the ones who have sorrow in their hearts for what they have done. Those who do not seek God’s forgiveness are forfeiting the mercy of God. The disciples who were gathered there were now all spirit-filled and as a group they would represent the church in the future and will still receive the Holy Spirit in a fuller way on the day of Pentecost. But here Christ is empowering them already to go and preach the Good News and to be filled with the Spirit and to teach forgiveness and encourage those who hear this message to be forgiven.

### **IV. The Imperfect peace of this world**

As I am writing this sermon, I am thinking of the work I have done through the years, of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation, in South Africa, here in the US, and other parts of the world. I am thinking of all the churches I worked with across the country, the police officers in Hartford, CT, the social workers in the Department of Children and Families, the groups of Israelis and

Palestinians who came to the US years ago for help to coexist with one another. All these groups and more needed assistance to understand each other's stories of hurt and anger and being misunderstood and more. They came to see whether forgiveness was possible because their experiences showed otherwise. The power of this earthly work of forgiveness and reconciliation showed me the power of the human heart to take the courage to forgive the other. I have seen miracles happen, and the work of listening and forgiveness continued without me. But I also saw how imperfect the peace and forgiveness of this world can be, as Christ says, "I do not give peace as the world gives," because the peace of this world is imperfect. It does not always last. It disappoints, and it gets abandoned when the desire for power and the weakness of human beings lead to hurtful thoughts and words and actions. The abandonment of peace can lead to broken relationships and can lead to a broken family or home, church, workplace, and a broken world. The unwillingness to forgive leads to the hardened hearts which prevent God from fulfilling the work through the Holy Spirit in our lives.

## **V. Conclusion:**

Although the Risen Christ calls us to be at peace with one another, and to speak forgiveness as the church of Christ, we often fail to do so. We must see and recognize those who come for their forgiveness from God. The church does not own it but is the instrument of God to speak it and to embrace everyone. We are also called to forgive one another for what they have done to us, and we are called to apologize and make right with those we have hurt. We must also think about this world and how it loses its will for peace and forgiveness. We must ask ourselves, what are you calling me to do, Lord, to bring about peace? What do I say? What do I do? Where are you sending me to? Here I am Lord, do as You please with me. This is the message from Christ as He appears to us this morning, saying, "Peace to you!" May God bless this message to all our hearts, minds, and souls. Amen!