

Barre Congregational Church

April 14, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Third Sunday of Easter**~

“The Risen Christ calls us to be Purified.”

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

Scripture Reading: 1 John 3 v 1-7

I. Introduction:

As imperfect human beings, we are always faced with situations where we must decide how to think, behave, and act in ways that are constructive and do not have negative effects on ourselves and/or those around us. It is not easy to be on the right path all the time. We make mistakes and we hurt ourselves and we hurt others, sometimes knowingly or unknowingly. Sometimes we get through it, and we feel better, and other times we become depressed, because we believe we failed ourselves and those around us. We are also surrounded by forces and circumstances that are not always helpful to what we believe in and the way we believe we should be living. Let's see what we can learn from John as he is attempting to help the congregations he oversaw in their own struggles as children of God.

II. Be purified, says Christ:

The Apostle John has become an older man now, as he is writing from Ephesus to the churches in West Asia Minor, in the region of modern-day Turkey. He spent his last few decades in Ephesus and wrote the Gospel of John and these three letters of John. He was the last living apostle and felt compelled to reassure the congregations which he oversaw about their faith in the Risen Christ. It was the end of the first century, and the churches were relatively young in their life in Christ, and in the development and strengthening of their faith. It was a period of religious pluralism, and superstition and paganism, and they were plagued by false teachers, as described in 1 John 2 v 19. They infiltrated the churches and brought confusion to them about their belief in Christ. One of the doctrines John felt compelled to address was the form of Gnosticism which had developed during that time. Some Gnostics believed that the world was developed by a lesser divine being, and that

Christ was a mere messenger of the remote Supreme Divine Being. They accepted Christ's deity, but not His humanity. They believed that matter was evil, and spirit was good, and therefore Christ could not have taken up the physical being. They separated the body from the spirit, and that the body was a prison in which the spirit was incarcerated. For anyone who committed sin, it meant that the spirit was not impacted by the sinful body.

John was concerned about this issue, as the essence of the church and the believers was that they believed in Christ who died and rose again on the third day. They believed the Risen Christ was intrinsically linked to the physical Jesus who lived and died. In Chapter 2 v 28 he encourages them to continue believing in what they have been taught and experienced in Christ, so that at His second coming, they would not be ashamed in their faith. He solidifies their belief in Christ, by talking about the hope they have in Christ. It is a purifying hope that gives the believer a solid foundation of inner peace and certainty that their help comes from God. He calls upon them to abide in Christ, who showed them how to walk the walk of righteousness and persevere in this world of confusion and darkness. They must cleanse themselves from their sinful desires, and they will have the strength because the Risen Christ lives in them through the Holy Spirit. To sin, he says is to be in opposition to God's laws of righteousness, and no one who lives in Christ keeps on sinning, he says in verse 6.

III. Conclusion:

During this season of the Resurrected Christ, we are not alone in what we are going through. The Risen Christ is with us, and calls us to be purified, and not fall into the trap of negative thoughts. We must not abandon our faith and be careful to not live a life that would be regrettable to Christ and to God. The Risen Christ calls us to follow His example of love and peace and forgiveness, and to live according to the values He promotes, a life that is uplifting and healing to ourselves, but also to those around us, and the world as we travel it daily. May God help us to go within and to purify our thoughts, our hearts, and may our lives be beacons of light, and of all that the Risen Christ stood and died for. Amen.