

Barre Congregational Church

May 26, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Trinity Sunday / Memorial Day Weekend~

“You must be born from above”, Jesus said.

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

Scripture Reading: John 3 v 1-17

I. Introduction:

If we were to truly listen to each other, what we are trying to convey, our thoughts and ideas, our beliefs about something, and more, then perhaps there would be less time for misunderstandings, arguments, divisions, and much more. We would be in a place where our relationships would be more harmonious, our ideas would be shared and respected, even though we would not necessarily agree with each other. We would be able to find our way together and build a better world where we all can live together in peace. Let's see what the Gospel of John is trying to convey to us in this nightly visit of Nicodemus to Jesus.

II. You must be born from above:

As a Jewish leader, Pharisee and skilled theologian, Nicodemus had his own ideas about God, religion, and the good life. He was a member of the ruling class, and of the Sanhedrin, and he stressed the careful observance of the Law and tradition of the elders. That was the way of salvation for him. He was curious, though about Jesus and His message of love and forgiveness, the miracles, and signs He performed. It was a bit awkward for a Pharisee and religious leader to come and spend time with Jesus, to have a conversation, instead of arguing with Jesus. He was there to listen, to understand, even though he had his own ideas about religion and spirituality. He was respectful and even paid Jesus a compliment about His spiritual gifts and acknowledged that Jesus was a teacher and sent by God.

But Jesus gave Nicodemus a different kind of response, one that puzzled him a bit! Jesus is providing him with an existentially different view of what he, Nicodemus thinks life with God is about. “No one can see the Kingdom of God, unless he is born again, with water and with the Spirit”. To be born with water meant that he would need repentance and purification from his

sinfulness. No human effort and obedience to specific laws can bring about the re-birth of the inner being that is necessary to enter the Spiritual Kingdom of God. A person must also be reborn with the Spirit to experience the inner working of God in their lives. So, it is good and well to observe that I am sent by God, Jesus says, and to acknowledge my message and gifts, but I need you to understand that no laws can save you from entering the Kingdom of God. You must be born from above, from the heavens, meaning, you must have God working in you, and then you need Me, the Son of God in your life, and then you need the re-birth of the Spirit of God to live inside of you, to live a spiritual life to the fullest. This was difficult news for Nicodemus, but he remained respectful of Jesus, defending Him with the chief priests later on when they challenged the temple guards for failing to bring Jesus to them. Nicodemus' response was that Jewish law required that a person could not be condemned without first being heard. and he even joined Joseph from Arimathea helping him to lay Jesus' body in a nearby tomb. We don't know what happened to Nicodemus after that, but his interaction with Jesus must have made him think about his own beliefs. He did not reject Jesus' views, instead he listened, and allowed Jesus to teach him. In addition, Jesus' comment about the Spirit, that "the wind blows where it pleases...must have had an impact on his life.

III. Conclusion

On this Trinity Sunday, we celebrate the power of God, and the Son and the Holy Spirit in our lives. We need all of God to be with us, to live inside of us, for our salvation, but also for our daily lives and that deep relationship with God that makes life easier to manage and that provides us with God's peace inside of us. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is crucial for us, as it brings us closer to our purpose and calling in this life. Through the Holy Spirit we become partners with God in fulfilling God's will for us and this world. God wants to show us the way, but we can only experience that extraordinary gift of God's guidance by allowing the Spirit to move inside and through us. So, the gift of the Son and the Holy Spirit is God's way of saying, you are born from above, from the heavens, so that the Kingdom of God can come down to this earthly Kingdom, with the gifts of love and peace and justice and kindness bestowed upon on all the earth. May God make this message clearer to all of us every day and help us to be grateful listeners first to God, and then to one another so that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.