

Barre Congregational Church

September 1, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost~

“Listen to Me, He said...”

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

Scripture Reading: James 1 v 17-27 and Mark 11 v 24

I. Introduction:

I have a feeling that God is excited about us here at Barre Congregational Church, and has an ongoing dream for our church...that more and more little children will run around in our fellowship hall, enjoying the space that God has given them and us to enjoy and build community together; that more young adults will find this to be their space to gain deeper knowledge about God and to discover ways they enjoy serving God and each other, and the community around us and beyond; that they would return home from a trip together with their youth leaders, sharing with us their experiences learning about how to be a leader in Christ in this world, and that they would be involved in a variety of ways in the activities of the church. I believe God's dream is that this church will be even more vibrant with adults coming and going and sharing their latest idea, activity and excitement of what they have accomplished this past week and want to share it here in our sanctuary and elsewhere with one another. These are also my dreams, and I know you have these dreams as well, and all others for their churches as well.

II. What do we need to listen to, according to the letter of James?

I want each one of us to take a moment and think about what we do for the church, what we have done for the church going far back, and what our hopes and dreams are for our church. Think about the good times we have had and are having now. Our church has obviously been going through trials and tribulations in the past, like many other churches have. Despite this and other issues, we all have our dreams and desires for our church like God has.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, at some point, rejected Jesus as the Messiah, but later believed in Him. He became a leader in the church in Jerusalem, together with Peter and others. In this letter to the believers who were scattered because of the persecution of Christians, James

encourages them to persevere during this time of trials and tribulations, but he also encourages them to listen to the word of God, but not just listen, but do the will of God. They must not be filled with anger and wrath but be transformed by the word and Spirit of God and live and act accordingly. They must not be trapped by outward rituals and norms but have that inner transformation and be filled with the love of God that is measured by a deep compassion for the poor, the orphans and the widows. They must confess and release their sins that are like filthy clothes and follow God's word of love and forgiveness and compassion. They must guard their tongue, how they speak and follow this pure religion found in the word of God. In all of this they will be blessed, and their congregations will grow and be blessed.

III. Conclusion:

On Friday I had a lovely video conversation with my oldest sister in South Africa. No, we didn't talk about girls' or women's stuff, or our family, which we do almost every day via texts. We instead talked about church and spirituality and our faith and prayer life. I was so impressed with my sister's courage in how she reaches out to people in our community in Wellington, talking to them about God, and praying for the sick. I was inspired by her child-like obedience to God and loving all those she encounters and following up with those whom she prayed for.

We are all called to live from the word of God, and to pray the way Christ prayed, and to have faith in our Living God who is on this journey with us. Whatever we go through, and we sometimes have difficult trials and tribulations, we are called to bring our desires and dreams to God in prayer, then we must believe that we have already received it and claim it as if we already have it. Then, we must thank God for blessing us with the things we asked and received, even if our situation had not physically changed yet. That is the faith Christ taught us to have in Mark 11 v 24, and what James is reminding us of here in our passage.

We must bring our experiences of faith into our churches for it to grow and be blessed by God. Growing a church can take many forms and can be accompanied by lots of pain and changes we sometimes face. There can be a formal outreach by a membership committee, making calls and writing letters to the community to come to one's church. There can be interesting activities for young people to draw them to the church, and there can be all kinds of social and cultural events to make people excited to attend. We can have courageous conversations about our church with

others, and while all of this is important, one core aspect to the growing of the church is about the inner workings of God in the lives of every member of the congregation. It is the stirring of the soul as it listens to the word of God and acting upon it.

Our houses of worship need all of us, to share our joys and spiritual lessons, to share our love for one another, and receive love. It is a place where we make beautiful memories and where Christ is the Head to help us all. May God bless us as we listen to God's word and act upon it, and dream about our congregation like God does. Amen.