

Barre Congregational Church

October 13, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Twenty first Sunday after Pentecost**~

Stewardship Sunday

“We are Grateful for life...”

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

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5 v 16 – 18 and Philippians 4 v 4 - 7

I. Introduction:

When we wake up in the morning, we experience the amazing phenomenon known as life. Many of us can observe life through sight and sounds, and then there are many who are physically challenged, yet have discovered their own ways and senses to appreciate life to their fullest. So, all of us are, in our own way part of this extraordinary gift that God has given us.

A few years ago, I asked someone, with many more years of experience in this life, what makes her fall asleep peacefully, since I have difficulty falling asleep occasionally! To my surprise, she began to tell me how she, before falling asleep, spends her time thinking about the people and things in her life she is grateful for, and that is just what she needs to fall asleep peacefully. I believed that it was a wonderful thing to do, but not just before bedtime, but to do this exercise anytime of the day. That conversation reminded me how important it is to spend time being grateful for life, for the ordinary things, and the people in our lives. I am sure this morning all of you have your own ways of being grateful for life. Sometimes life is not as easy as it seems, and it can be difficult to be grateful, even when we try, and even when we have prayed.

II. Our Call to be Grateful for Life:

Paul understood this entire concept of gratitude for life. He understood what it meant to be joyful, and when life was difficult. He knew from his personal experience that there are times when we do not feel gratitude, particularly in his letter to the congregation in

Philippi, because he wrote to them from prison after being persecuted for his faith in Christ. And still he encouraged them to rejoice in the Lord always, and that they need not be anxious about anything, but with thanksgiving, present their requests to God, knowing that God is with them, and in their faithfulness, they will experience the joy of life in God.

So, when Paul writes to the Thessalonians, who have suffered their own adversity, he thanks God for their faith and gave them guidance in all the challenges they may face on a personal level. He cared for them and understood their circumstances as young Christians who weren't understood by those around them. He wanted them to experience life joyfully, but what that means, he says in verse 15, is to be kind, even to those who have been hostile to you, because that is the life of the follower of Christ. Even Christ was not immune to suffering, and yet He encouraged His followers to live a life of love and peace and kindness, and that kind of living comes from the life of the Christian who has been born again into this new life of Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is a life of love and forgiveness, because that is who Christ was till the very end. He then counseled them to pray always and to give thanks to God in all circumstances, for it is the will of God for the children of God.

III. Conclusion:

As Christians we are called to be joyful always in this life, because the joy we have comes from within, from the Spirit of God. We have many opportunities to observe the simple things in life and be grateful for it, and we are urged to persevere in faith when life is difficult. On this first Stewardship Sunday, we especially want to thank God for our own lives, for our loved ones, and all the people and things we have and care for. We are grateful for our work, income, a home, and more, knowing that there are many who have less than we have, and go through difficult times. We are grateful for life, and therefore we come and ask God to renew us, and to help us discern how to be good stewards of our church, how to be kind and how to forgive. And, when we say, here I am, Lord, may God bless us as we go forth with the hand of God upon us. Amen.