

Barre Congregational Church

April 18, 2021: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Third Sunday of Easter** ~

“The Power of His Presence!”

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

Scripture Reading: Luke 24 v 36b - 48

I. Introduction:

I am wondering whether you have had the experience of meeting someone whom you never thought you would meet or encounter...someone that made an impact on you; or maybe you were hoping to see, or hear from someone from your past, an old school friend whom you hoped you would see again after many years, someone you have been wondering about? Do you remember that feeling when you had those encounters? One experience that remains an extraordinary one for me, was the day former South African president Nelson Mandela was released from prison. It was quite an extraordinary day for us South Africans, because we did not in our wildest dreams believe or imagine that we would see him alive and freed in our lifetime. I remember the exhilaration and joy and amazement as we all rushed to the prison where he was held and released. There were lots of people, and we all traveled from there to the City of Cape Town to see him and hear him speak for the first time in public after 27 years in prison. It is a day I will never forget. As I am reminiscing about that experience among others and also about your own experiences, my heart goes out to the disciples who may not have believed they would see their Lord, the Messiah in person again after He was crucified, died, and was buried in a tomb.

II. The Power of His Presence

The appearance of Jesus Christ to the disciples, left them with both doubt and fear on the one hand, as they thought He was a ghost; and on the other hand, with awe as this experience was beyond them and their human understanding of Him as He entered their space and time of loss and sorrow. There was a mix of emotions... disbelief, joy and amazement. They were still dealing with the empty tomb, and probably talking with one another about what He told them

before His death, what the women told them about seeing Him, and what their strategy should be going forward. They may not have expected that He would appear to them, but maybe they were hoping quietly that they would somehow see Him again. And here He was, His physical appearance was that of the Christ who was crucified, wounded, and He still carried His wounds with Him, meaning He was not taken up into heaven where He would be glorified and transformed into His heavenly existence. His presence transformed their pain and sorrow into utter joy and hope.

Jesus' appearance brings a message of peace to His distraught disciples. While the greeting is the greeting He taught them to use as they were entering people's homes, it is especially an important greeting, as it brought a message of hope to a group of people in distress and worry and loss. His appearance brings reassurance and comfort to the grieving group. "Why are you troubled? It is I myself – look at my hands and feet!", Jesus said. After they still did not believe, He asked them for something to eat as proof that He is indeed risen and that He is here with them. Eating with them may not have had the purpose of fellowship, we do not know, but it certainly must have felt like the times they would eat and have fellowship together. It was a reminder of their special friendship. His appearance brought them spiritual enlightenment, as He took them back to what was prophesied about Him in the Old Testament, and as we are reminded of Him in the Temple right at the beginning of His ministry, quoting Isaiah 61, and the purpose of His ministry. The Christ would die, but rise again on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness will be preached to the nations. He opened their minds by speaking to them in those powerful words, words that would transform their despair into hope and purpose. He would then empower and commission them to carry the message of the Good News to the nations. We see at the start of Acts and into the first few chapters how these disciples who were witnesses of Jesus' life and ministry became powerful messengers of the Good news.

III. Conclusion: The Power of His Presence for us today

While we cherish those who have made or are making an impact on our lives, we have someone in an even higher power who has shown us the power of the resurrection, the power over death and dying, despair and suffering, and loneliness. The Christ whom we follow is alive as He is sitting at the right hand of God, and is also present in our lives through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

In our own moments of worry and distress, we have the promise and certainty that Christ is with us through it all. Our physical challenges and those of our loved ones can sometimes be overwhelming, and it is when we cry out for help in those moments, when Christ appears and wants to comfort us, help us, guide us, and heal our lives.

Christ's resurrection appearances are hopeful messages for us as well today. We have been given hope, and we too have been given a commission as well, to continue spreading the Good News of love and peace and forgiveness and compassion for all those around us.

May He appear to each one of us in ways that will fill us with joy and amazement and hope for tomorrow and the days ahead. May the power of His presence transform our lives for the glory of God. Amen