

Barre Congregational Church
April 26, 2020: Third Sunday of Easter

***“Do not let your hearts be troubled, says the Lord...”* by Pastor Margaret Keyser**

Last Tuesday, a week ago, I found myself in bed thinking about this global pandemic, and remembered different moments in my life how God came to my rescue, during good and bad times, both in South Africa, my place of birth, and here in the United States. I remembered how I would wrestle with God about something, until I would reach a point of clarity -- and certainty that God was with me, that God heard my prayers. I remembered how God revealed something in ways I could not explain, other than me having persisted in prayer and faith and hope that the situation would change, and then it did. You must recognize similar moments in your own lives, right? That Tuesday night I realized I needed to go deeper into the heart of God to find a word of comfort, a word of hope, a word that brings light into this moment of darkness we are all going through.

I could almost hear how the Spirit of God whispered to my soul. It is about prayer, Margaret...I murmured back... but I am praying, Lord! Many are praying already, but people keep on dying and falling sick, Lord! After some time I surrendered, and I knew that, that was the message I had to convey to you as a congregation... not a formal sermon, but a message about being a praying church, filled with hope and expectation; being a praying church crying before God, being upset, and then gaining strength and hope and faith for a hopeful future. It is about praying like Christ during His trials and tribulations. It is about praying until we see how God shows up in unexpected ways, during a time like this!

It is true that we are journeying through one of the most challenging times, like the Israelites of old in the desert. Our world has suddenly changed right before our eyes. One day we were making plans about this or that, and now, here we are...finding ourselves in the middle of a pandemic with its stark realities that have changed the lives of millions of people. It has left much pain, so much loss, so much despair. It is also a time where we receive so much news through our television screens, newspapers and the internet, the constant analyses, the updates, about this dire situation. While it is all important, it can also feel overwhelming at times.

So, how do we pray during a time like this? I find myself, like many others, seeking God during the night and in the early mornings, for a message of hope, for something to say that will bring a ray of sunshine. These questions made me think of The Lord's Prayer. Jesus gave His disciples the greatest prayer of all. He personally taught them how to pray the Lord's Prayer. It is a prayer that captures everything we need to sustain ourselves. It acknowledges God as the God of the heavens, Who cares about the needs of ordinary human beings, our food, our protection and our daily lives. It is also a prayer that asks God to transform this world into a world that is like heaven! This has been Jesus' intention on His earthly journey, for those in the crowd and the leaders to understand this! They crucified Him instead!

Jesus taught His disciples to pray like that, and He teaches His church, you and me to pray like that as well... Help us, provide for us, Lord and transform our lives and this world into a place like heaven, where there is love and peace and mutual understanding and respect for and among all human beings, and respect for the planet we have been given. Give us another chance to restore what has been broken. So, we have this time to pause and do the things we have not been able to do in a while, but it is also a time to pray together as a congregation, and as families and loved ones. It is a time to speak to God in the simplest ways we could... in the quiet of the night, or in the early morning hours as dawn breaks.

What do we do with our fears, you ask? Well, we also have Jesus encouraging His disciples in John Chapter 14, where He told them not to be troubled. He knew He was approaching the scariest and deadliest time of His life, but He also understood their troubled hearts, their fears. Despite what was awaiting Him, He encouraged them. He did not desert them but overcame His gruesome death and showed up through His resurrection and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That same Christ is with us today, encouraging us not be troubled in the face of this storm, but to stay the course in prayer and faith that God is with us in the storm. While many are working to find the vaccine and treatments necessary to deal with the virus, Christ is inviting us this morning to be a praying church, to pray everyday together, wherever we are. Let us do that, and let our hearts not be troubled, because we serve a Living, and Powerful God Who shows up when we least expect it. Amen.