

September 3, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost**~

“Setting our minds on Divine Things.”

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

Scripture Reading: Matthew 16 v 21-28

1. Introduction:

Many or all of us have gone through moments in life where we were or are afraid of certain things, or animals or people or certain phenomena, such as thunder and violent storms, and more. We are afraid of losing our jobs or falling sick with a serious illness. Fear is real for many of us, and it is difficult to get over it, for various reasons. Sometimes we also resist things that come our way, when they upset our plans, or make us uncomfortable. Yet, we are grateful for the help of others in dealing with these issues, maybe in therapy, or loved ones, or a good friend.

2. Setting our minds on Divine things:

When Jesus told His disciples here in Mathew 16 verse 21, that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, and that He must die, it was a shocking announcement for them, especially for Peter, who had just been consecrated by Jesus as the rock upon which the church will be built. They were given the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, to preach the will of God for this world. This message made Peter scream, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to You!” Peter knew the real threats Jesus was facing, and for Him to declare that he had to go down to Jerusalem, made these threats too real and imminent. It meant that He would face those in power, who would decide whether He should live or die. Were they as disciples ready to lose Him? No, of course not. They were afraid of Him being killed, and for their own lives. But they were especially afraid of being alone without Him in this world. His presence filled with love and compassion would be missed. Peter must have wondered; can we do this on our own? Jesus’ reaction to Peter’s natural outcry of horror, was somewhat strange. “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but merely human concerns.” One would think what harsh reaction from Jesus, but in essence His reaction

is about another power behind Peter's words, that of Satan's, says R.T France in his commentary on Matthew. Here his aim is to divert Jesus from His chosen course, which is to fulfil the will of God, even if it meant He would be killed. Christ's interest is for the world to hear about God and God's saving work of humanity from its own destruction. Peter does not recognize all this and seems to look for the easy way out. He who is the rock, becomes now the stumbling block, resisting the plans of God. Christ reprimands him not to stand in the way of God's will and purpose.

But more, to follow Christ, Jesus says, means they must put loyalty to Christ first before their own self-preservation. If it means that He had to die, or even they themselves, that will mean the choice for true life, the life of the Kingdom of Heaven. What a difficult situation the disciples encountered, standing on the verge of losing Him and to be confronted with the reality of losing their own lives, due to what they are standing for. Following Him meant they had to make up their minds about their own interests or that of Christ. We are aware that Judas betrayed Him and Peter denied Him when He was about to be killed, decisions they regretted terribly.

3. Conclusion:

For the disciples to set their minds on Divine things, they needed to have faith in God to be with them always, and in the Holy Spirit, their companion in giving them wisdom. They needed to trust God to fulfil God's mission through them in the world they were living in. They needed to be redirected away from their imperfect human traits and be more like Him. It is a call to confront their fears and resistance with God on their side.

What a call and what a journey. Christ comes to us this morning to assist us in overcoming our own fears and resistance and free ourselves from the things that hold us back from the richness of the call. It is a call of love and joy, but it is also a call of sacrifice. It is a call to be obedient to Christ, to God to go where we must go, and to speak and do what we must. It is a call for genuine compassion and peace and justice. This call can cause us to be in trouble here and there, but deep down each one of us knows when our conscience tells us what is right and what is wrong. To be on the path of Christ, means we must seek that which is right and peaceful and loving and set our minds on that divine path. May God help us discern what that might be in our own lives, and here at church and in our community and beyond. Amen.