

February 5, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Fifth Sunday of Advent - Communion**~

"The Secret Wisdom of God Through Christ!"

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

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 2 v 1- 16

I. Introduction:

One aspect of my pastoral visitations and phone calls which I find important and deeply fulfilling, is to allow God's Spirit to move in the conversation, during moments of need, pain, or joy and peace. Being present in this way, and listening to understand the situation, I find allows for God's work to be done, or God's message to be revealed, and leads to a deeper understanding of what is needed, and what needs to be done. These pastoral visits or phone calls have the potential to build deep and meaningful relationships with our loved ones. It brings together the human aspect as well as the spiritual dynamic in what Paul would call the mystery of God, where words must submit to the secret wisdom of God through Christ. Sometimes these conversations can become quite lively, and beautiful, and the interactions reveal our personalities and our passions and quiriness in wonderful ways. It becomes a getting to know of one another and love for the church, and discussing past and present service to the church, some of them sharing how they miss attending church, because of being home bound. Leaving those visits or conversations lead me to go within, be quiet and pray deeper and lean on God's wisdom for the way forward. It is all so humbling and makes the words of Paul even more important when he says in our passage, "I came to you in weakness....and with the demonstration of the Spirit's power." I do sometimes feel my human weakness more in wondering what to say, or how to be, and therefore must submit to the work of the Spirit, so that God's work be done and seen.

II. The Secret wisdom of God through Christ:

In his message to the church in Corinth, Paul declares himself weak and fearful and with much trembling in his ministry to the Corinthians. He does not think of himself as eloquent or someone with the superior wisdom and the flamboyant rhetoric, which the traveling

philosophers or the Sophists of the time were known for. The Sophists were known as professional speakers of wisdom and would travel the Greek world teaching others how to speak and use arguments in public debate. Paul therefore declares to the church in Corinth in verse 4 and 5 that “My message and my preaching were not wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.” He is letting them know that the wisdom he speaks of, is of a different kind. It speaks of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God had destined for our glory before time began. He then goes on to say that none of the rulers of the time understood it, otherwise they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. And so, the wisdom Paul is speaking about to the Corinthians is not about the wisdom of the world. It is about God’s mysterious thoughts which are revealed to him and those called by God, by the Spirit of God.

Paul encourages the Corinthians in Chapter 1 that, instead of being divided over whom they should be following, Paul or Apollos, they must remember that his ministry among them is all about Christ and the message of the cross, he says. He reminds them why they are a church, that their core beliefs need to focus on Christ, not on who is the best, or be swayed by human wisdom and who can argue better than the other. This message of the Good News is very simple, and it is meant to be humbling and transformative. It is about the change of heart and mind, which can only be done through the work of the Spirit in you, and that’s why I feel so weak and I’m trembling, because I am not like these philosophers, he says. I just come as an ordinary person to be with you, and to share what God has done for me, and what God wants to do for you. This does not mean that Paul was not an excellent scholar as well as a good debater, says Paul Gardner in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. He refers to the passage in Acts Chapter 17 v 19-34 where Paul stood up at a meeting at the Aeropagus, addressing the philosophers and many others and talked so eloquently about the living God versus their worship practices and belief in an unknown God. Despite his gifts and excellence as a scholar there, he makes it clear in our passage, though that God chose the weak things, the humble ones to shame the strong ones. No one must boast before God.

III. Conclusion:

Paul's message about humility and weakness and the calling of ordinary human beings for the purpose of being vessels of the secret wisdom of God, is both awesome and hard to follow. We all know that these are the qualities God wants us to embrace and live out as followers of Christ. In my pastoral visits and calls I see how important it is to go and visit in that spirit of humility. We are all called to be just that, humble, peaceful, weaklings in the hands of God. Some of us may be philosophers and teachers, school principals and scientists and managers at our work, and finance people and IT people and more, home makers and parents and cooks, all with great skill and experiences. At church we might be Sunday school teachers, committee leaders and volunteers, great organists and choir directors, fantastic finance people and trustees taking care of our building and other assets, and others are pastors and deacons and missions folks reaching out and serving others. All of us come with our gifts, and all of us might think, we are pretty good at what we do, right? That is wonderful of course, until God shows up and looks at us, and strips away a lot of what we feel we have accomplished. God wants to fill our hearts and minds with the mystery and wisdom of the Spirit of God, in humility and in service.

May God help us all to listen and to yield to this message of Paul, to be such vessels of humility in God's hands, in order for the secret wisdom of God to be revealed through us.

Amen