

Barre Congregational Church

January 29, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Fourth Sunday of Advent** ~

“ Christ Bringing Light into the Darkness !”

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

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4 v 12-23

I. Introduction:

We all have moments in our lives when we feel we need a little more light in our lives. Things look and feel a little too dark, we'd say...let the light in! When the power goes out for an hour or two, or more, we feel the discomfort already, because the things we are used to, the lights, the heat, making a cup of tea or coffee, cooking, using our computers and Wi-Fi, all of it impacts our lives when the power goes out. Sometimes when we feel sick, and struggle to feel better, we may feel like there is too much darkness, loneliness, pain that only stops with certain kinds of medications, and chronic health issues that make one feel so dependent on certain drugs and wonder why life can't be a little lighter, easier. We look around and we hear many stories about people suffering from mental health issues, stories of drug dependency, stories of violence and racism and homophobia and economic struggles. This past week we saw the media filled with the story of the painful and unnecessary brutal death of a young man, Tyre Nichols, in Memphis Tennessee, an event that leaves a dark and ugly mark in the life of that community and with all of us. The list can go on. Many times, we hope for a personal story of change, of light. We hope for the system to change and bring light into our lives. When we have more light in our lives, when we experience relief from our struggles, from illness, from pain, from financial struggles, we feel better, healthier, supported, lighter, like a heavy weight has lifted, and because the darkness has been eliminated. So, what does all this have to do with Christ here as He is taking a walk and calls these fishermen?

II. Christ's call and mission to bring light in the darkness

In our previous passages in Matthew Chapter 3, we see Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist, and filled with the Holy Spirit, and then driven into the desert where He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He received the power of God in its fullest sense, to fulfil His call and mission

and to live authentically, to speak the truth of God, and to proclaim to his audience the importance of loving God and neighbor as themselves. He received the power to heal, perform miracles, and to withstand the temptations in the wilderness by Satan. This message of the Good News of God would stand against anything that is not of love, of compassion, of care for neighbors, and of peace, because the essence of His message required a different approach of, and treatment of humanity, and especially those who were poor and, on the margins, the sick, the beggars, the ones from a different culture, the sinners. Jesus' message of the Good News and His status and claim by others that He was the Messiah would be a danger for Him. This is important to note because of the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus' predecessor, who, because of speaking out against Herod Antipas's illegal marriage to his brother's former wife, which was against Jewish law, was arrested and imprisoned by Antipas. John who, according to Herod Antipas had too much influence on the masses, needed to be removed from society. John of course also saw Jesus as the One who would baptize the people not with water, but with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Jesus therefore left the area and moved back to the Galilean villages where it would be less dangerous at the time. He moved into the area of Capernaum, a lake-side town, where He would have the platform to speak from and an audience more open for his message.

In verse 16 we see the imagery of a people in darkness, who need the light that He brings as the Messiah of God, prophesied by Isaiah. The people who sat in the dark, saw a great light. For Isaiah the light indicated hope during a time of hopelessness because of the destruction caused by the Assyrian invasion. Matthew saw in Isaiah's prophecy the fulfillment of the life and message of Jesus Christ, the Messiah for a world that needed hope and light.

To speak about the transformation of darkness into light in the context of His time, meant He couldn't really do it alone, even though He was filled with the Holy Spirit and filled with the power of God. He realized that in order to live out his purpose, that he needed to surround himself with people who would follow him, who would listen to this message from God and whose lives would be transformed to be like him, to live like him and to speak and to act like him.

So, through the power of the Holy Spirit, He got Himself ready to identify a group of people who would join Him in this purpose, ordinary people who would follow him and with Him would set

the stage for God's church in this world. His call was not just an invitation, but a command for them to follow Him; fishermen with their nets, and fishermen in their boats. They would become fishers of men and women, using the metaphors of their working life, not for the purpose of eating, but to work in the Kingdom of God on earth, learning from Him. They would commit themselves to a completely different lifestyle and direction in life. They would learn from Him and witness His powerful healing miracles and be inspired by Him. They would learn about all the things that would in time become part of life of the early church and beyond. They would make a commitment to be different people and be part of this inner circle with Christ.

III. Conclusion

This call of the early disciples is a reminder for us of our own call to be followers of Christ. At some point in our lives, we too received that call to follow Christ...to be here in this church, where our hearts and minds and souls are being touched by God's word and being in community with one another. We too have been busy with our own stuff when that call came to follow Him. Christ calls our names, in the middle of the night, when we are working, and go about our days, when the minister preaches, and when fellow members extend the invitation to come and serve the church of Christ. Christ appears and manifests Himself in wonderful ways, in gentle ways and in more powerful ways. We are the sheep He identifies, and then we become fishers of women and men, to serve and to love.

And so, as we are standing at the beginning of a new year, as a congregation, and as families and loved ones, we are reminded of that personal call as children of God, and also to hear our call in new ways, to recognize the Christ of old and the Christ today in our world with all its challenges and dark spots. It is a call to pray to God for a better today and tomorrow and through our prayers, and words and actions we become partners in Christ for this new world order to bring light into the darkness. Like Christ and John the Baptist, we too live during dangerous and challenging times. As the church of Christ, with Christ as the Head, we have the security of His presence, His light, His power, and the power of God's Spirit with and within us to help us with our own issues, and to discern how to respond to the darkness around us. May we feel God's presence this morning as we surrender our lives into God's hand and let us ask God to help us, guide us and hear our prayers for new beginnings in this world of ours. Amen