

Barre Congregational Church

July 14, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**~

“To Live in Praise before the Lord”

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

Scripture Reading: II Samuel 6 v 5 and 12 – 15 and Ephesians 1 v 3 -14

I. Introduction:

My sense is that our lives are first and foremost focused on ourselves, and those immediately around us. At the beginning of the day, we are focusing on what we must do. We make plans, and we have intentions and ideas that we want to implement. We take care of our loved ones, serve our community, and we come to church to worship and to serve. And then there are the deeper aspects of our spiritual lives, which can vary from person to person. This might include a prayer life, because we know we need God’s help. We read the Bible, and we love to sing and worship God. But there seems to be a special meaning attached to the praising of God and what it can mean for us. Let’s see what our passages reveal about that.

II. David and his ambitions:

David’s story starts as a young man who was a simple shepherd, and who became a harp player in King Saul’s court. We know of him, as he fought off the power of Goliath through his faith, a sling and a stone. Because of his successes he became the enemy of King Saul of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, who plotted to kill him on several occasions. Saul believed in the Old Tribal Confederacy where the tribes were held together under his rule, and yet they also had their independence. In doing so, Saul managed to preserve the unity of Israel and the affection of his country people.

David later became King of Judea, and with the demise of Saul, became the King of both the Southern and Northern Kingdoms, that is, the whole of Israel. Old Testament historians such as Bernard W. Anderson call him a shrewd politician, who stopped at nothing to achieve his political ambitions. He captured the whole of the Land from Egypt to Lebanon, and from the

Mediterranean to the Arabian desert. His eyes were set on bringing the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to the old fortress of Jerusalem. This is where we find him in II Samuel Chapter 6 verse 5, “celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals.” One crucial aspect of the holiness of the Ark of the Covenant was that no one, even in the most innocent manner, was to touch the Ark, instructions given to Moses and Aaron, which is what Uzza did. The ark had been at the house of Uzza’s family, and they moved it on a cart, which we do not know whether that was allowed, but they obeyed the orders from David and were about to set on their journey, when Uzza was struck by the anger of God. Even David was afraid of the anger of the Lord against Uzza. In a roundabout way we then see how the Ark of the Covenant was transported to Jerusalem, the City of David, and how David danced before the Lord, and the entire house of Israel were shouting and playing on their trumpets. What an effort, and ritual and what jubilation and celebration! We see many of the psalms ascribed to him, and in his ambition, wanted to bring the ark to Jerusalem. His intentions were both political and religious. He was king of the whole of Israel, but he was not perfect. He had his own troubles and he made mistakes. The people missed their independence and his popularity started to wane, says Bernard Anderson. David also had his personal troubles and throughout his reign as described in II Samuel and elsewhere. He was the victim of his own greatness, says Anderson, but we also see a man whose last words were, “Indeed, my house stands firm before God, for He has made a perpetual covenant with me...”, II Samuel 23 v 15. In his successes and failures as a human being, he lived and praised God until his death.

III. Paul and the Spiritual Blessing in Christ:

While David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, the Center of Holiness during his time, we see Paul in the letter to the Ephesians encouraging them to be holy and blameless in God’s sight. It was prohibited to touch the ark of the Covenant, but under the new dispensation, in Christ they are made new, and therefore their inner beings must be transformed. In Christ they have the redemption and forgiveness of sins, and under Christ as the One head, all things in heaven and on earth must be brought together. We are children of the Most High and are marked by the seal of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, and whom we must be in a relationship with. But Paul starts his letter and ends this part of it with these words, “Praise be to the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, and ends it with these words, “...to the praise of His glory.” They must live in praise of God always.

IV. Conclusion:

As children of God, we are called to live in praise before the Lord, with all our hearts and minds and intentions. Yes, we do have our own intentions, aspirations and ambitions, but with all that, we also need to come into the presence of the Lord, praising God from the depth of our being. We live during a time where we can touch the inside of our sanctuary and our Chapel. We do not have any constraints as described in the story of David and the Ark, but we do have a deeper spiritual call, which Paul reminds the Ephesians of, the call to be holy and blameless. We are called to live as children of the Holy One, with the seal of the Holy Spirit written on our hearts. We are called to live and speak as children of God, in love and peace and respect and care for all of humanity. We are called to make good decisions for ourselves and those around us. In our praise of God, we ought to live in honor of God and in good relationships with all those around us. May God help us to live according to God’s will for each one of us. Amen