

Barre Congregational Church

July 21, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Ninth Sunday after Pentecost~

“In Christ we are all Reconciled with one another”

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

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2 v 11- 22

I. Introduction:

In many homes there are feelings and experiences of peace and joy. This is how it is meant to be. Home should be the place of safety, love, acceptance and where we work through our differences, to find mutual understanding and common ground. This should be the case with neighbors, communities, organizations, churches and within our nation and among nations. To be understood and loved gives us the feeling of peace within, and when we make others feel loved and understood, they feel at peace as well. It is wonderful to see the love and peace and joy between and among people around us. The opposite is true frequently, though. When we do not see eye to eye, and we find ourselves in an argument, just one argument with another, the feeling of peace within gets disturbed, and other feelings arise, such as anxiety, defensiveness, anger, resentment, and more. The more disagreements we have, the more we find ourselves in situations of conflict, which become very difficult to resolve. These disagreements and conflicts tend to escalate and the feelings of peace within can disappear and leave us empty, lonely, depressed, and unfulfilled. These situations of conflict can lead to fear of the other, and deep divisions among us, our churches, organizations, homes, communities within the nation and among nations. These divisions become strong walls we cannot climb, and vulnerable bridges we cannot cross to reach one another. Does this sound familiar to you? Have you experienced some of this in your life? Let's then see whether there is any hope for us in this letter of Paul to the former Gentiles in the church in Ephesus.

II. In Christ we are all reconciled with one another:

Paul is addressing the Gentiles, a group of people who were historically excluded from the Israelites, the people of God. They are now a new group of believers in Christ, and need his encouragement, and reminder that the life they lived before has now past and have been made

new in Christ. Their history of being excluded from the people of Israel meant that they did not have a life with the living God. Theirs was a life of worshipping other gods, which became part of who they were. In contrast we find the people of Israel being acknowledged by God as God's people. In practice that meant that walls were put up to keep the Gentiles apart from the people of Israel. For example, they were kept apart at the Temple of Jerusalem by high and strong pillars, so each would have their own courts. The Jews were circumcised, and the Gentiles were uncircumcised. The Torah, with its moral and ceremonial laws became the center of knowledge about God for the Israelites, but not so for the Gentiles. Paul himself became circumcised and acknowledged the practice as part of Jewish life. In this letter Paul is trying to highlight the moral aspect of the Torah to remind the Gentile believers of the love of God, and how they and all who follow the Torah should love God and each another.

In reaching out to the Gentiles, and bringing the message of Christ to them, bringing them closer to God, meant that they felt less estranged from the inner circle of those who knew God. As new believers in Christ, they needed to know that there was nothing, no wall, especially in Paul's description, the Torah and all the laws and regulations, that could keep them away from the love of God. Christ died for them and all of humanity, and in and through His death, He reconciled humanity with God and with each other. In Paul's theology, there is no more wall between Jews and Gentiles; they are all one, through the life and death of Christ. Christ broke down the walls of hostility and estrangement and made them all one in Christ before God. No more fear of the other, no more divisions, but one humanity of love, acceptance, and peace. This, Paul says was the intention of the salvation in Christ. Christ reconciled them all with God and each other.

III. Conclusion:

This message of Paul to the Gentile believers is so relevant for us all today. The peace and joy we experience as outlined earlier tends to be quite fragile. The divisions which we create among ourselves, and others tend to hang around and can lead to so many bad feelings. These feelings do not get better unless we acknowledge the destructive power of conflicts, divisions, anger and hate, and take the courageous act of reaching out, and forgive one another and make right which is not right. The message that Christ broke down all walls, all barriers, must be taken seriously by the followers of Christ, the church of Christ, because we are the church, in Christ, and Christ's message is a message of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. This is a call to us as the church, as families and loved ones, to our schools, our sports organizations and more. This is a

call to every person, and every leader in our community, nation and the nations to not allow our beliefs, our convictions and our self-interests to become ingredients to the creation of walls that divide us. Too many people get hurt in the process, and too unnecessary situations of pain and brokenness prevail, which prevent peace and reconciliation to have a chance. Since we are already reconciled with one another through Christ, may God help us to start over, anew, make changes and make peace, and live in peace with one another, with all our differences. Christ is indeed our hope and through the Spirit of Christ we have received the inner strength to live a life of peace and reconciliation. Blessings everyone. Amen!