

Barre Congregational Church

September 15, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost~

“Take up your cross and follow me, Jesus said.”

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

Scripture Reading: Mark 8 v 27 - 38

I. Introduction:

It is not surprising that when one moves to a new location, people wonder who is this new neighbor? If they feel comfortable, they will bring something to eat, or just welcome the new neighbors. It is also natural for the new neighbors after some time, to wonder what our neighbors think about them. What do they say to each other about me/us? The majority of people have some good, or neutral responses, but there may be some with not so good responses or perhaps feeling a bit hesitant to say anything about the new neighbors. If the new neighbor after a few weeks invites the others to come to a barbeque, I'm wondering what the response would be? Oh, great, some would say, and others, not sure about it. We don't know them yet, and others may say, not interested!

II. Whom do people say I am, Jesus asked His disciples:

In our passage, we find Jesus engaging with His disciples about who they and the crowds and the villagers believed He was. Before this conversation, He had been going around in Galilee, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, and healing the blind man. I can imagine that Jesus in His quiet time must have wondered what people were thinking about Him. Who is this guy? He has these amazing powers to do all these wonderful things. Yes, indeed, in some passages in Mark, we read that they were wondering. What is this new teaching? We have never seen anything like this. King Herod thought it was John the Baptist whom he had beheaded, coming back for revenge. The disciples wondered who this Man was that even the wind and the sea obey after Jesus had calmed the storm. Others thought it was Elija returning, because of the mysterious way he had disappeared. And others thought he was a prophet because of the powers in Him. When Peter answered Him about what

they as disciples believe, that He was the Messiah, He commanded them to keep this a secret until the Son of Man had been risen from the dead. This question of Jesus is about His identity, which Jesus was curious about, but which He was not ready to reveal.

III. Take up your cross and follow Me, Jesus said:

Jesus then goes into a teachable moment with His disciples, predicting what will happen to Him. He will be rejected by the elders, the Chief priests, the teachers of the law. He then will be killed and will rise on the third day. This was too much for them to hear, of course, and Peter challenged and rebuked Him for what He said.

Jesus' response to Peter, get behind me Satan, implied that Peter must not act like His opponent, but submit himself to Him as the Messiah, who must go through these difficult times ahead. Verse 34 is the culmination of this conversation about Jesus' identity. He revealed Himself to them as more than just the person who did all these wonders and miracles. He was more than just the one who taught them about love and kindness. He revealed to them that because of all that, He must and will suffer and die, because these values He teaches and lives out, are not accepted by His opponents. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and pick up his cross and follow Me. They must sacrifice everything for the sake of Him and the Gospel. There is a large measure of sacrifice in following Christ, it suggests. What will it do if you gain the whole world and what it has to offer? You will lose your relationship with Almighty God, because the values of God fill one up, more so than what the world does. By following Me, He says, you take on a life that is not always attractive, easy, but worth it, because of the love of God for you. Following Me, however, means to live justly, and humbly and addressing issues that the opponent would not approve of.

IV. Conclusion:

It is good to have good neighbors and to be good neighbors, because it is good to be good and nice and kind and loving and giving. There might be moments when we will need each other as neighbors, in time of need. It is also important to get to know our neighbors a bit better. Neighbors could be our neighbor next door, but also the ones at church, and other places we enjoy being part of. It is important to know what we can do for one another to help, build relationships and to feel connected. Jesus welcomes us to get to know Him better, the good

things but also the things that may not always be ok with others, because of the values He espouses. It means to understand the call of following Him, what it means personally, in our homes, at work, and at church. What is my call, and what does it involve? What does Christ want from me here at Barre Congregational Church? Sometimes the call is easy, and sometimes not so. Sometimes we have good times together, and sometimes we go through difficult times. But through it all, He calls us to not bow out, but to stay in line and ask for help from God, and one another. It is a call that have in mind the things of God, not the things of this world. May God help us all as we stand at the beginning of this new season with our church, each one with our own calling. Our calling is not the same for everyone. God calls us for a specific task, and we must stay in that lane and do the best we can. As we do that, we also allow the next person to stay in their lane, and not get in their way of fulfilling their task and call God called them to. God calls us, equips us, and we follow, and we surrender ourselves into the hands of the Almighty. May God bless us and keep us and help us. Amen