

Barre Congregational Church

October 27, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Twenty third Sunday after Pentecost**~

Third Stewardship Sunday

“We are Grateful for our Church...”

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

Scripture Reading: Acts 2 v 42 – 47 and Ephesians 2 v 21 - 22

I. Introduction:

On this last Stewardship Sunday, it is good to look back at our activities and achievements this past year. To see what we have done and how far we have come, should fill us with gratitude for our church, the place where God is, where we are in fellowship with one another, and where we worship God and serve each other and our community.

II. An Early Church filled with the Holy Spirit:

It is also good to look further back to the Early Church and be reminded of how it all started on the Day of Pentecost, when God’s Holy Spirit came over those who came together to worship God. It was nothing like what they experienced before, when they started talking in tongues and when Peter stood up and explained that this was exactly what the Prophet Joel talked about, that the Spirit of God will be poured out onto God’s people, and they will prophesy, see visions, dream dreams, and see signs and wonders. Peter, in his sermon on that day, conveyed to the crowd that they must repent and be baptized, and they will receive and be transformed by this Holy Spirit. The response was incredible with 3000 who came and accepted Christ, repented and were baptized and became part of that early church. In the Book of Acts, Luke gives us a picture of the identity and characteristics of the church of God, with Christ as the Head. This fellowship of believers, he says, devoted themselves to the essential activities of the life of Jesus’ followers. They were devoted to the teachings of the apostles about Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of their sins. They were becoming a new community of believers, through the transformation by the Holy Spirit who now lived inside of them. Their lives were changed by a power far greater than

themselves. They were in fellowship together, breaking bread and eating together in each other's homes. They experienced a new friendship of love and sharing, worshipping God and praying together, and observed and experienced the wonders and miraculous signs done by the apostles. In and through this deep and transforming experience, they shared everything in common, and felt the need to sell their possessions, and distribute the proceeds among those in need. What they have become was not out of their own power and will, but by the powerful work of God through the apostles and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that crowd. And as they were together in fellowship, experiencing the spiritual blessings of God in their lives and among them, Luke says in verse 47 that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Paul echoes this very special bond of the fellowship of believers in the letter to the Ephesians and highlighted how God seeks to be present with them always, and to bless them as the Body of Christ.

III. Conclusion:

How grateful that crowd must have been, to have encountered the Holy Spirit, who filled them with love, hope, peace, and joy, nothing like the temporary feelings of love, peace, and joy we experience on a human level. Many of them were hopeless, and found hope in the teachings of the apostles, the support from their fellow believers, and being delivered from their illnesses and poverty.

The transformation that God brings about, is driven by God's love, Agape, which permeates the lives of individuals and the community of faith, to be different, and to act differently, like God. We too have the gift of the Holy Spirit with and in us, and we are here this morning, showing our gratitude to God for our church, and how God has blessed us and kept us together. Like the Christians during that time, we too must continuously look to God to heal us, forgive us, bless us, and help us to be loving and giving. We are called to be in prayer in private, but also in public, so that God will bring those who need God into our fellowship. May God bless us with this ongoing transformation inside of us, and may God bless our fellowship, and all that we do here at Barre Congregational Church. Amen