

Sunday 12 June, Trinity / St Barnabas

Barnabas and the Holy Spirit

Acts 11.22-30,13.1-3 Matthew 10.7-13

Today is Trinity Sunday but we are particularly celebrating St Barnabas' Day, which was yesterday, 11 June. Barnabas was a man of faith, a man devoted to and guided by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There is quite a lot about Barnabas in our reading from the book of Acts but I think the part we remember most is from Acts 11.24. It says that he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

As Barnabas is regarded as a saint, it is not unusual for him to be known as a good man. Saints were mostly good although sometimes their goodness was most noted for its contrast with their earlier life. Not so for Barnabas. There is no sign that he was not known from the beginning as a good man. The word *good* is related to the word *god*. Barnabas was a good man, a godly man, a holy man.

He was also full of faith. Barnabas spread the good news of Jesus to many and he also brought them practical help and relief when they were in need. He loved God and his neighbour. Barnabas is often mentioned with Paul. If you look up all the mentions of these two early Christians, we hear initially of Barnabas and Paul and after a while it becomes Paul and Barnabas. It sounds as though Barnabas was initially more prominent in early ministry, but Paul grew in stature and became the better known over time. Barnabas is credited with introducing Paul to Peter and the other disciples, who were initially wary of this former zealous persecutor of Jesus' followers. This might explain the gradual rise of Paul with the assistance of Barnabas. Barnabas encouraged Paul and commended him to others.

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. I would like to focus today on why Barnabas was perceived as being full of the Holy Spirit. Saints were often known for particular qualities or associations. What would you say Barnabas was known for? ... He is the patron saint of Cyprus, but I think this is just because he came from there. He is often called the Son of Consolation or the Son of Encouragement. He showed these characteristics. Consolation and encouragement are two different things in English, but in the Bible they are translated from the same Greek word *paraklesis*. This word means to come alongside someone.

Encouragement, or exhortation, was a particular gift of the Holy Spirit that was so evident in Barnabas that he was called the Son of Encouragement, meaning he showed in his life, in all that he did and said, this particular gift as an indwelling part

of himself. Barnabas encouraged or consoled by coming alongside people. If you had been a part of the early church in those days, Barnabas would have been running along the sidelines of your spiritual race, urging you on. He would have been the leader of your cheer squad.

Coming alongside someone means treating the other person with respect in this bringing together of goodness and of grace. Encouragement and compassion or consolation travel alongside one another, just as Barnabas frequently travelled with Paul. I love Psalm 85, verse 10. *Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.* I think that encouragement and consolation do the same, caring for another in good times and bad.

The verb which relates to the noun *paraklesis* is *parakaleo*, meaning literally: I call out alongside: calling, giving voice, advocating, championing confidence and also doing, delivering, offering, and enacting compassion.

Coming alongside is a particular way of helping someone. Teachers and mentors know the difference between being the sage on the stage or the guide on the side. *Parakaleo* is being the guide on the side, helping in ways that empower the person being helped. Being on the side is not taking all the power and all the credit but empowering the other person. It is also being on their side when advocating for them with another, being a supplicant with them and for them. It is a lot to squeeze into one word.

Parakaleo and *paraklesis*. Do you know a similar word for the Holy Spirit? ... The *Paraclete*, mostly commonly translated as the Advocate.

Barnabas was himself a *paraclete*, an advocate to Paul and for Paul, and not just in the human sense. Barnabas was filled with the Holy Spirit and enabled by the Holy Spirit. He was fired up. The Holy Spirit worked through Barnabas to encourage and guide Paul. The Paraclete helped Barnabas to also be a paraclete. Of course, for the Holy Spirit, being alongside someone is not only being there but being fully with them.

So, Barnabas travelled with Paul and mentored him. Who has travelled with you on your spiritual journey? Who has encouraged or mentored you in faith? You might think of parents and godparents, other family members, friends, colleagues or people from your church family, past and present. Sometimes it might even have been a stranger, encountered in particular circumstances. You might have had a fired-up

spirit experience or perhaps a still, small voice. For many people it is a gentle wordless nudge that somehow moves them in a particular direction. As well as being guided by the Spirit and by others, you may also find spirit-led ways to come alongside others to encourage, console, advocate, or help in other ways.

In our reading from the Book of Acts, we hear how *the disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea; this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul*. They send practical help to those in need. This is in line with Jesus' actions in the Gospel reading from Matthew. Jesus sent out his 12 disciples to help people with specific needs. They were to do this from a base with good and worthy people and were not to be concerned about any recompense for what they did. Barnabas was also known for his practical support of those in need. This has always been an important part of Christian discipleship, an expression of loving our neighbour.

Many people in this parish have encouraged and mentored me, both in ministry and in the life of faith over the years. Sometimes this has been in prayer, in exploring the scriptures in a deeper way, or in showing love and compassion. Just as Barnabas also attended to practical matters, so I have also been taught many practical things: how to sort for the Boutique, how to hang the banners to remind us of particular parts of the story of faith, and how to prepare and set up the altar to facilitate and to express the importance of the sacrament of Holy Communion in our time of worship. Of course, there have also been other things outside the 4 walls of the church. May we all continue to follow the example of Barnabas - a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

I leave you with the words of a prayer for St Barnabas's Day that is used in The Church of Ireland:

*Bountiful God, giver of all gifts,
Who poured your Spirit upon your servant Barnabas;
Help us, by his example, to be generous in all our judgements,
and unselfish in our service;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*