

Saint Barnabas / I Trinity 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Acts 11.22-30 St. John 15.12-16



His name, Barnabas, means “Son of Consolation” or “Son of Encouragement”. He was an important figure in the Early Church in Jerusalem. He and Paul were the missionary bishops who preached the Gospel to the Gentiles. While Paul gets most of the credit...it was Barnabas who first mentored Paul.

Our exploration of the life and work of Barnabas might seem more like a history lesson than a sermon. Almost everything we know about Barnabas comes from the Church’s earliest history book...*Acts of the Apostles*...and from other reliable sources such as *The Church History*, written by Eusebius, the 4th Century Bishop of Caesarea.

Barnabas was born in Cypress to wealthy Greek-speaking Jewish parents who named him Joseph. Paul mentions him in his Letter to the Colossians and identifies him as a cousin to Mark the Evangelist. He was an early follower of Jesus. He was known for his kindness and generosity.

Luke describes Barnabas as a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”. He was a key member of the Jerusalem Church. He owned property around Jerusalem. When fledgling parishes were struggling to meet their financial obligations, he sold all of his property and gave the proceeds to the Church.

After Paul saw the Light that is Jesus on the road to Damascus, he went to find Barnabas. It was Barnabas who first introduced Paul to Peter and the other Apostles. Paul’s reputation as a persecutor of the Church was well known. Peter was skeptical of his conversion at first...but Barnabas’ support of Paul was enough to convince Peter and the others Paul’s conversion was genuine.

When we think of Paul and Barnabas we should think of them both as “Apostles to the Gentiles. This morning’s reading from Acts gives the account of their missionary journey from Jerusalem to Antioch, a journey fully supported by the Church in Jerusalem. It was in Antioch we were first called “Christians”.

Acts records while Paul and Barnabas were praying with leaders of the Church in Antioch, the group was filled with the Holy Spirit who instructed them to set Paul and Barnabas apart for the work for which he had called them. They fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them...and sent them off. Paul and Barnabas were now missionary bishops to the Gentiles...they were *Apostoloi*...“sent out ones”!

Paul and Barnabas set out on their first major missionary journey. Barnabas’ cousin, Mark went with them. Their first work was not as successful as they would have wanted. Mark got discouraged and decided to return to Jerusalem. When Paul wanted to revisit some of the places they had preached, Barnabas wanted to take his cousin Mark with them. Paul told Barnabas because Mark had deserted them once before, he could not go with them.

The disagreement over Mark caused a deep rift between Paul and Barnabas. They went their separate ways. Paul and Silas travelled to Syria; Barnabas and his cousin Mark went to Cyprus. This is a good example of how even the best of friends...even within the Church...can have their differences. Paul and Barnabas later reconciled and Paul called Mark a “brother in Christ”.

Barnabas’ most important work took place before he and Paul started their missionary journeys. Jewish Christians in Antioch insisted Gentile converts get circumcised and keep Jewish dietary and other laws before they could be considered believers. According to Acts, Paul and Barnabas “got into a fierce argument with them.”

Paul and Barnabas decided to go to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles and try to resolve the matter. Along the way...they witnessed God’s power at work among the Gentiles. The Apostles welcomed Paul and Barnabas. Even Peter had to admit to Paul and the others they were wrong to force circumcision on Gentile converts to the Church.

What do we learn from Barnabas? He consoled...he was a mediator who tried to resolve differences. He encouraged...he strengthened others by his faith and work. We should all try to console and encourage others...like Barnabas.

