



ENCOURAGEMENT

Sermon 863

The Feast of Saint Barnabas

Wednesday, June 11, 2014

949th Week as Priest

775th Week at St Dunstan's

40th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Barnabas was a key figure in the days of the Early Church, following Christ's death and resurrection, his ascension into heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. So it is only fitting that we remember him this day. His original name was Joseph, but the other apostles were so impressed with his spirit of generosity and humility, and his kind words to those in need, that they gave him a new name—Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement.”

In the little town where I served my first parish church, it was common for men to receive a nickname like that. It would typically be for something they had done in school or sports, or some prank they committed

in their youth. Thus, lots of men in Fayette were known by names such as Pork Chop, Dough Boy, Rail Head, Fido, Skipper, Buster, Bubba, and so forth. I've always been glad that I didn't actually grow up in Fayette, Alabama! It's hard enough having an unusual name like Wells, but to be known forever as Professor, or Egg Head, or Specks would have damaged my fragile self-esteem. (And for that matter, I think that almost everybody has a fragile sense of self-esteem and self-worth, and that nobody—and I mean nobody—has the right to criticize or judge another person's worth.)

Barnabas was apparently a true encourager of others, and I happen to think that encouragement is one of the spiritual gifts—along with wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, faith, and holy fear. Barnabas made many journeys with Paul and Timothy and John Mark, and I am certain that his indomitable optimism and good will were a blessing not only to his companions in the way, but also to those who first heard the Good News from them.

For if the Good News is not encouraging, then what is it? We are saved from sin and death, and from the drudgery, despair, and “weight of all this weary and unintelligible world.” (William Wordsworth) No, life is

hard enough as it is, and we all need help, love, support, and encouragement. We all need the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

We are healed by the love of Christ, and we are marked as his own forever. That's good news, and good reason to be "strong and of good courage," as Saint Peter liked to say.

So here is my question for you today: What are you doing, on a daily basis, to be a source of encouragement and hope for others? What have you done, as a follower of Jesus, and as an apostle of our Lord, to show forth his love and grace in your own life and circumstances?

We were all reminded on Sunday, which if you missed it was the Day of Pentecost, that we are encouraged to exhibit the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control.

As Saint James is known to say, we ought to be known not just by our faith, our belief, our words—but just as importantly, by our works, our deeds, our loving kindness towards others, our encouragement of others.

So with a word of encouragement, a loving embrace, and the hand of friendship, let each of us become like Barnabas, a mirror of the Good News, people known for their encouragement of others. **AMEN.**

611 words