

**Festival of Barnabas Year B 2021**  
**June 6, 2021**

(Correction to bulletin: Second reading is Acts 11:19-30, 13:1-3)

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

Today we are celebrating the festival day for Barnabas, who was one of the disciples that traveled with Paul to preach to the Gentiles in the early days of Christianity. We don't often hear much about him, and honestly, most years, we wouldn't even print his festival day in our bulletin unless it happened to land on a Sunday. However today, we have the joy of celebrating Mychal Morrison's confirmation day (at the 11am service), and since the festival day for Barnabas is not far off, it seemed appropriate to use his story in our worship today.

Barnabas was one of the early converts to Christianity, and was among the early church community in Jerusalem after Jesus' death. We're not entirely sure what he was up to before he became a follower of Jesus, we don't get an idea of his call story, but we do have several highlights of his life as a disciple. The first we hear of Barnabas, who is described as a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, he has sold his field, and given the proceeds to share with the new Christian community. He remained in community with them, and had been with the disciples for some time when Saul, a persecutor of Christians was converted in Damascus. When the converted Saul, whom we all know better as the apostle Paul, traveled to Jerusalem to meet the disciples, they were afraid of him, and did not believe he had become a disciple. But it was Barnabas, who based on tradition had probably studied with Saul in Jerusalem at some time, Barnabas took it upon himself to introduce Saul to the disciples, and share with them the story of Saul's conversion and preaching. If it weren't for Barnabas connecting Paul with the disciples, the face of Christianity may look very different today.

After this, Barnabas and Paul set off on Paul's first missionary journey to share God's word with the Gentiles, encouraging them to continue in the faith, appointing elders in each church, and entrusting them to the Lord. After returning, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to debate with the elders and apostles whether the Gentiles should be required to follow Jewish law in order to become Christian. Barnabas and Paul recounted their stories as missionaries among the Gentiles and all that God had done with them. After much debate, the council sides with Paul and Barnabas, that Gentiles did not first have to become Jewish and follow Jewish laws in order to convert to Christianity. After this, Paul and Barnabas spent some time in Antioch, before they set off on separate missions to continue their work. Tradition states that Barnabas likely died as a martyr during his mission in Cyprus. The disciple Barnabas is known as a peacemaker, debater, evangelist, and missionary.

But beyond simply seeking to get to know another Biblical character, what's the point of hearing about Barnabas? Why does he matter today?

Each one of us has been called to a life of discipleship, just like Barnabas. In our baptism, we were welcomed into God's family, and we became children of God. Just like Barnabas, we were filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. We received the gift of salvation, and God called us to live as disciples. And at the end of the baptismal service, we were welcomed into community with these words: "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." And, "We welcome you into the body of Christ and the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world." We have been set apart by God as disciples in this world.

We see from Barnabas' story that the work is sometimes risky, it isn't always easy, and it isn't always glamorous, but the Holy Spirit will guide us and empower us wherever we go. Barnabas took a big risk in seeking to convince the disciples to accept Saul. He could have been exiled from the community with no way to survive or provide for himself. As he journeyed with Paul, they were always in danger of being arrested or killed for their faith. And Barnabas was rarely in the spotlight on their journey. As the story of their travels is told in Acts, Barnabas is almost always listed second to Paul. And when he and Paul went before the council in Jerusalem, he had to stand up for his faith and fight for what he believed was right. Barnabas had a hard life as a disciple, but this was the work to which God called him. Filled with God's love, filled with the Holy Spirit, Barnabas lived a life of service and proclamation, a life of discipleship.

And this is the life to which we have been called as well. As disciples, each one of us will serve in a different way, unique to our own skills and abilities. But God has equipped each one of us so that we may serve this world in a variety of ways—through our jobs, volunteering, generosity, praying, hobbies, random acts of kindness, and more. And as we live as disciples, we proclaim our faith through our words and deeds. We share God's love with a world in need.

As Mytchal is confirmed today, and many of us have affirmed our faith at some point in our lives, we recommit ourselves to this life of discipleship. But we do not do this work alone. We promise in the service of confirmation to support and pray for the confirmands and one another in our lives in Christ. Christians throughout the world pray for us daily, seeking to support us in our work. And we gather in this place each week to continue to support and encourage one another in our work. We are the body of Christ and we all work *together* as disciples in the world.

And even when we're out in the world and feel all alone, we also remember that we have each been gifted with the Holy Spirit; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and the spirit of joy in God's presence. This Holy Spirit will help us discern God's will, strengthen us when we are weak, draw us back into community when we are lost, and guide us to serve and love God in all we do.

With the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ to support us, we, like Barnabas are strengthened and empowered to live as disciples in this world, serving all people, and striving for justice and peace in all the earth. Thanks be to God. Amen.