

Second Sunday after Pentecost—June 11, 2023

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin

Acts 11:19-30, 13:1-3

*<sup>19</sup> Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. <sup>20</sup> Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

*<sup>22</sup> News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*

*<sup>25</sup> Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup> and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

*<sup>27</sup> During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup> The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

*<sup>13:1</sup> Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

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

Do the names Dale Carnegie and/or Tony Robbins mean anything to you? Though they lived a century apart from each other, they are very similar. They are motivational speakers, advising people on how to be positive, energetic and successful. We might call them "encouragers." How about the name Anne Sullivan? She had a very rough start in life. Her family emigrated from Ireland during a famine and came to the U.S. Soon after that her mother died and her father abandon her and her brother. By sheer determination, despite poor foster homes Anne was able to get a high school education and became a teacher of children who were deaf and blind. With little social grace and some pretty rough edges on her personality she was a blessing to many. One of her students, a most difficult one, was Hellen Keller, a name you are more likely to know. Anne Sullivan enabled Helen Keller to break through the barriers of profound deafness and blindness. She truly was an encourager. Mark Twain called her the "Miracle Worker". A movie by that name told her life story, especially her work and relationship with Helen Keller.

Another name we can add to this category of encouragers is St. Barnabas. His birth name was Joseph, but at some point in time he was called Barnabas, which means, "Son of Encouragement". The first mention of Barnabas in Holy Scriptures was in communal Jerusalem soon after the Pentecost. It is

recorded earlier in the Acts of the Apostles that here in Jerusalem he sold a piece of land and gave the proceeds to the church. As we consider the events in our text this morning, we can learn about the art of encouragement from the Son of Encouragement. Let's listen and learn as we see that

### BARNABAS MODELS THE ART OF ENCOURAGEMENT.

St. Luke tells us here in Acts 11 that after the stoning of Stephen persecution of believers in Jesus broke out in Jerusalem. Many left Jerusalem and went in various directions. Some ended up in Antioch, which lies at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. There some of the believers who originally were from Cyprus and Cyrene began to tell Greek people about the Good News of Jesus. As a result many Gentiles came to faith in Jesus as their Savior. Perhaps because Barnabas' home was in Cyprus and the evangelists in Antioch were from Cyprus, Barnabas was sent by the Jerusalem church to investigate what was happening in Antioch. By his reaction when he arrived in Antioch and assessed the situation we see that "Son of Encouragement" was truly a fitting name. Listen once more to verse 23: When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He rejoiced to see that the same grace of God which had brought him so much comfort and strength was working powerful in the hearts of the listeners in Antioch. He urged them to continue in their faith, in hearing the message of Jesus and sharing it with others.

His rejoicing over the conversion of Gentiles provides a model for us in our encouragement of others. Just three weeks ago eight young people stood here and confessed their Christian faith and made their confirmation vows. Rejoice that the Holy Spirit through the powerful Word has brought them to this point in their spiritual life. Keep an eye on them. Encourage them to remain faithful to the Lord.

There is much rejoicing to be done over the spread of the gospel around the world. Rejoice that WELS Home Missions has set a goal of 100 new mission congregations in the next ten years. With prayers and offerings you can be an encourager.

Our WELS World Missions also give us reasons to rejoice as Barnabas did. Make an effort to continue to be informed about Academia Cristo in Latin America and the numerous requests for help with pastoral training in various countries in Africa. Last week the CELC, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference held its triennial meeting in Seoul, South Korea. What a reason to rejoice. The CELC is made of church bodies from around the world whose doctrine and practice are faithful to the Holy Scripture. This worldwide fellowship which was established in 1993 with thirteen church bodies, has grown to include 34 church bodies today. What a reason to rejoice! Most of these church bodies are quite small, so these gatherings serve as a great encouragement to our fellow confessional Lutherans around the world. With your prayers and offerings you are part of that encouragement.

Barnabas fulfilled his name by supporting and mentoring Gospel workers. After Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus and his time in the wilderness, he was met with much suspicion when he came to Jerusalem. After all he had been one of the chief persecutor of those who belonged to "The Way". That is how the believers referred to themselves at that time. It was Barnabas, who sponsored Saul to the believers in Jerusalem. They probably had an acquaintance with each other in prior years, since they were both Jews who had grown up far from Jerusalem. Now in Antioch as the number of believers increased more manpower was needed. So Barnabas made the 90 mile journey to Tarsus to recruit Saul as a co-worker in the church in Antioch.

We, too, can be encouragers of Gospel ministry workers. This could be done by speaking to young people about their life's vocation and studying to become a staff minister, a Christian teacher, or a pastor. Your encouragement of your pastor and the pre-school faculty and staff are important and deeply appreciated. LWMS has a wonderful program, designed to encourage both home and world missionaries. You can be a modern day Barnabas as you sponsor and support Gospel workers.

Support your preschool teachers and staff and your pastor with words of encouragement, with prayers and financial support. Rejoice with them as their gospel ministry brings blessings to the congregation. Stand by them when plans and programs don't work out as hoped.

We also see that Barnabas was an encourager as he responded with concern and action to those who were suffering. The prediction of a severe famine led the Antioch congregation to provide help for the believers in Jerusalem. Barnabas was an active part of that effort as he and Saul were sent to Jerusalem with the gift that had been gathered. We have numerous ways to be like Barnabas. When a gathering of supplies is necessary, so that Good Shepherd congregation has household goods ready to help those who are seeking assistance, you can be an encourager by contributing items and also by helping to organize donated items.

We also have WELS CARE – Christian Aid and Relief. WELS CARE receives no synodical budget money. Its mission is carried out with special offerings directed to it by individuals, foundations, and organizations. WELS CARE responds to natural disasters here in the United States, usually offering assistance through local congregations. It also organizes projects for volunteers to help with clean-up efforts after hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires, etc. Many of its projects are overseas responding to needs in areas where we have sent missionaries or in places where our sister churches proclaim the Gospel. A vital project carried out in numerous Third World countries is providing wells for fresh water.

WELS Kingdom Workers right now is gathering funds to assist in southern Malawi. Recently a cyclone did severe structural damage, destroying among other things numerous outhouses. Because of that typhoid and cholera are now at epidemic levels. Some of this funding will be used to construct hardened outhouses which can withstand the high winds of a cyclone.

Finally, we see that Barnabas was an encourager in a very direct way. After Saul and he returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit in a very direct way told the Antioch church to send out Saul and Barnabas on a missionary journey. After this first journey as partners, they returned to Antioch and then formed two teams and multiplied the foreign outreach efforts of the Antioch church.

Not everyone can be this type of encourager, but with prayers and offerings we can support those who can. Through WELS Missions there are opportunities for short-term mission trips, both national and foreign. They usually assist with canvassing or VBS. Some teams are made up of family units and sometimes it is groups organized by a congregation. These are excellent ways to be a mission encourager while having a different life vocation.

Barnabas' model sets a high standard doesn't it? How do you measure up? I know I don't! Even Barnabas would tell you that he wasn't the perfect encourager. He received the most important encouragement that can be given—what we too need. He knew his sin and he knew his Savior and the forgiveness that Jesus supplies with his life, death, and resurrection. That encouragement is what will provide us with the determination and strength to be Barnabas style encouragers. Keep focused on Jesus. Keep in mind what the letter to the Hebrews tells us: **“And let us consider how we may**

**spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)**

The responsive reading of selected verses which we read as The Invocation at the beginning of our service morning, both remind us of the spiritual encouragement we have received and the encouragement which we can give. I suggest that you keep this page and reread it from time to time.

Barnabas provides a wonderful model of the art of encouragement. His model is different than Dale Carnegie or Tony Robbins or Anne Sullivan. But Barnabas' encouragement has to do with spiritual and eternal matters, which makes his model a far more important one to follow. Be a Barnabas. Be a Son of Encouragement.

Amen.

Pastor Joel Jaeger