

13 June 2012  
St. Barnabas, Apostle (observed)

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“A Remarkable Man”

Text: Isaiah 42:5-12; Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3; Mark 6:7-13

Barnabas was a remarkable man, a remarkable apostle. He seems to be able to do things other cannot, or will not, do.

When we are first introduced to Barnabas, in Acts chapter 4 (vs. 36-37), we are told that he sold some of his land and gave the proceeds to the fledgling church in Jerusalem. He didn't wait until he knew they would succeed or get large enough to survive. *He just did it.*

Mark doesn't tell us the names of the 70 that Jesus sent out two by two, for who they were isn't important. It was who they preached, who they were representing, in whose name they were going, namely Jesus, that was important. Nevertheless, other early, non-biblical writings tell us the tradition that Barnabas was one of those 70, going out with ***no bread, no bag, no money in his belt*** - and wearing only ***sandals*** and one ***tunic***. *It took courage to do that.*

And it was Barnabas who went and got Saul and brought him into the church. First at Antioch, as we heard, and then introducing him to the leaders in Jerusalem. *Others* were afraid of Saul, the great persecutor of the church, and perhaps doubted his conversion - whether it was real or a ruse; whether it was true or just a way to infiltrate the church and hurt it more. *But not Barnabas.* He goes and gets Saul, and he and Saul then become partners in the first missionary journey sent out from the church in Antioch.

*What gave Barnabas the ability to do these remarkable things?* It was, of course, His Saviour. The One who laid down His life for Barnabas enabled Barnabas to do the same for others. The One who blessed Barnabas with great wealth enabled him to use that wealth for others. The One who forgave Barnabas and chose him to go out as His representative enabled Barnabas to forgive Saul and bring him to the church for the glory of Jesus. Barnabas knew that his wealth wasn't in his property, his security in what he had, and his life not in the hands of any man. All this was from God alone. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who created Barnabas, redeemed Barnabas, and sanctified Barnabas with the forgiveness of all his sin.

And so while Barnabas was a remarkable man and a remarkable apostle, most of all he was a man of remarkable faith.

Now that is not to say that this was all easy for Barnabas - I'm sure that it was not. But faith is not the absence of fear and doubt, it is the gift that connects us to the One who transcends them. Faith doesn't mean things will be easy, but that they will be good. That as you go out in faith, God will accomplish His good and gracious will *in* you and *through* you for others. There will be times of rejection, trouble, and disagreement - like there was for Barnabas - but faith clings to God and His promises and receives its strength from them.

And so it was the death and resurrection of Jesus that made Barnabas who he was, and it is what makes you who you are. For Jesus is the one who, as Isaiah wrote, ***opens the eyes of the blind***, and who has opened your eyes - once blinded by sin - to see Him as your Saviour. Jesus is the One who ***brings out the prisoners from the dungeon***, and who has brought you out of the dungeon of sin and death. Jesus is the One who has done a ***new thing*** and made all things new, including you. That through the forgiveness of your sins you be a new creation and live a new life - no longer in the darkness of fear and doubt, but in the light and confidence and love of the Lord.

That new life was reflected in Barnabas' name. His given name was Joseph (Acts 4:36) but the apostles called him *Barnabas*, which means "son of encouragement." And he was that because he was a son of God.

And so it is for you. You are who you are because you are sons and daughters of God. And so your new name: *Christian*. I don't think it an accident that, as we heard, ***the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch***, where Barnabas was. I think that when you were around Barnabas, the son of encouragement, you wanted to be that. You saw in him the love of Christ and wanted to live the same. There was something about Barnabas that made him different.

It is the same thing that makes you different. The love and Spirit of Christ that live in you. The forgiveness of Christ given to you. For the death and resurrection of Jesus is not an historical event that you remember and that motivates you, but a ***powerful reality in your life***. In Holy Baptism, you really do die and rise with Christ. In repentance you really die to your sin and are raised to a new life in the absolution. In Holy Communion, you really eat and drink the crucified and now risen body and blood of Jesus, Son of God and son of Man. And so like Barnabas, your wealth, your security, and your life are not in anything of this world, but in Christ alone. And there they - and you - are safe, no matters what happens in this world and life.

That's the freedom that enabled Barnabas to do what he did, and it is the freedom that enables you to do what you do. You haven't been called like Barnabas to go out two by two, you may not have land to sell and give to the church, and you may

have no Saul to go get. That's okay - you're not Barnabas. But Barnabas isn't you either. But the same Lord is using you the same as He used Barnabas, to do remarkable things. To pray, to encourage, to do good, to befriend, to help, to repent, to forgive, and to show others the joy of salvation, the joy of forgiveness, the joy of having a Saviour - a Saviour who has done a new thing; a thing never done before in all the world. A Saviour who came to us with nothing so that we could have everything. A Saviour who came and got us enemies so that we could be His friends. A Saviour who paid the wages of sin with His death on the cross, to purchase you for eternal life.

So I guess, actually, I was wrong. I started out this sermon saying that Barnabas was a remarkable man. But no, *Jesus is the remarkable man*, who has done it all for you. And that - well, that's truly remarkable.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.