

The Festival of St. Barnabas, Apostle
17 June, Anno Domini 2018
St. Mark 6:7-13
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Were you scratching your head this morning, wondering “I don’t remember ever hearing the name Barnabas in the list of the twelve apostles.” You’re right. He wasn’t. We only hear of Barnabas in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Some hold that he was among the 72 Jesus sent out during His ministry. He doesn’t fit the description that is typically associated with apostles yet the Holy Spirit in Acts 14 calls both Barnabas and Paul apostles. It is believed by many that Barnabas and Saul were Jewish classmates who studied together under the famous rabbi Gamaliel. Barnabas was then extremely active with Paul during Paul’s first missionary journey. It probably shouldn’t even really be referred to as only Paul’s journey. The Holy Spirit had set aside both Barnabas and Paul for the trip. Barnabas was responsible for bringing Paul (at that time, Saul) from Tarsus to Antioch and then, after their missionary trip, to the Jerusalem Council. It wasn’t until they disagreed quite sharply about John Mark and his fitness for the ministry, that Barnabas and Paul separated from one another and went their own ways. They remained perfectly united on doctrine and later Paul would continue to commend Barnabas to others. They simply didn’t agree whether John Mark, who had left them in Pamphylia should be entrusted again with the work of the ministry.

The how of Barnabas’ apostleship is not of great importance. The Holy Scriptures attest to it and thus we gladly confess it. What we rejoice in today is what Barnabas boldly believed and boldly confessed to Jews and Gentiles alike. Barnabas believed and preached the sufficiency of Christ and the forgiveness of his own sins in Christ. The life that he had through Holy Baptism was his greatest treasure.

We meet Barnabas, previously called Joseph, in Acts four where we are told that Barnabas, in faith, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet to be used for those who were in need. Such selfless sacrifice is not something which should cause us to praise Barnabas, but rather to praise God. After all, what did God give to Barnabas but the complete remission of all his sins through the Blood of

Jesus Christ and the hope of everlasting life as a free gift given of God's own righteousness! These gifts alone bring true and lasting joy. The great guilt of our sins no longer stands against us! Our Lord and brother in the flesh has born our sorrows and our sins and now lives and is seated at the right hand of God graciously ruling over all things in heaven and on earth for the good of God's children - for our good. What is earthly treasure compared to that? What will fields and lands and bigger houses and titles and awards and popularity gain us that Christ hasn't already promised?

And yet, when we examine ourselves we realize that our hearts are filled with doubt. Dogged by the unbelief of our sinful nature we worry. We fail to pray. We withhold our help. We withhold our offerings. We may even find it a bit foolish for Jesus to send out the twelve with no provisions. That's irresponsible! So they are just supposed to count on the hearers of the word to provide them with their daily bread? They're just supposed to trust that God will give them their food at the proper time? Yep. And so should you. Do you not think that God will give you what you need? Do you think your heavenly Father will withhold any good or perfect from you when He has given you His Son into death and the poured out the Holy Spirit? Why do you grumble when you must do without? Why, as God's children, do we long to fill our bellies with earthly things and worry about them while the treasures of eternal life are shoved to the side as only of secondary importance?

Repent. Faith seeks after Christ - continually. Faith rests only in Christ and measures God's love only in Christ. Faith doesn't rest in the multitude of earthly belongings or in the lack of suffering or discomfort. These things come and go at the direction and for the good purposes of God. Faith rests only in the word of Holy Absolution and is satisfied only with the life-giving food of Holy Communion. Faith, confident of the heavenly Father's love, sees the things of the world as nothing more than the passing means of living in this world and presses such temporary things into the service of eternal things.

Barnabas gave, but not because this made him anything. It couldn't. It didn't make him holy. It didn't make him righteous. He gave because he had first received from Christ what nothing in this world could every possibly give - a clean conscience before God, the joy of knowing that his own terrible sins had been paid for by the Blood of Jesus. He gave because He had been made holy and righteous by Jesus as a free gift.

And this is the greatest gift that Barnabas could ever give - the Gospel that he was so eager to preach not just to Jews but to Gentiles - to the whole world. Notice the order of things in Acts 11 and 13. The good news of salvation is preached and those who believe naturally respond to God's mercy shown to them by giving and showing mercy to their neighbor, caring for those in need in Judea. They support the apostles in their ministry, they support their brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering want, and they support their unbelieving neighbors in their need. The love of God for sinners begets faith and the great joy of faith begets love for God and for our neighbor.

Faith without works is as dead as works without faith. Faith is not self-centered. Faith looks outward and bestows love on friend and foe alike because faith rests in and is filled by the promise of Christ. Faith rests in the love that has first been freely given by God the Father. Faith isn't chasing after benefit. Faith wants nothing in this world because faith has received nothing from this world. All that faith receives is from God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. Faith joyfully gives of its firstfruits so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the free forgiveness of all our sins might be preached to all people and so that those in need might be helped. It doesn't give because it seeks something in return. Faith gives because it has already been given everything in Christ - it has been given the word of reconciliation, the good news that Jesus has died for our sins and been raised again for our justification.

May God grant that we find encouragement in the example of faithful Barnabas, the son of encouragement, and with him, press our earthly treasures into the service of the Gospel, that God's mercy may be shown to all who suffer in both body and soul. May the Holy Spirit stir up such faith in us that Christ alone may be our joy and treasure, so that we might always hear the faithful witness of the apostles and believe and lay hold of the rich treasures of God's grace and mercy.

In the Name of +Jesus.