

**11<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

**St Barnabas, Eucharist**

**Job 29: 11-16, Actos 11: 19-end and John 15: 12-17**

**Mother Emma**

I wonder how many of you woke up this morning, remembering that today was St Barnabas' Day? There is one person in this congregation who is always totally amazing at remembering all the Saints' Days throughout the year, but I won't embarrass her by telling you who she is. Of the rest of us, I suspect St Barnabas was not our first thought this morning, and many indeed might have some difficulty bringing his story to mind.

In summary, Barnabas was a teacher in the Early Church, in the years immediately after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, as we have recently celebrated. He was one of the group of disciples who followed in the Way of Christ, and who shared everything they had in common, in order to ensure that no-one among them was poor or in need.

We first hear of Barnabas early in the Acts of the Apostles, when we are told, *There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.* Already we know that he is a Levite, educated and connected with the Temple in Jerusalem, that he originally came from Cyprus (where today he is commemorated as patron saint of the island), that he is generous and altruistic, and above all, that he is widely recognised as one who encourages. Barnabas next surfaces in today's reading from the book of Acts. He is sent out to newly converted Gentiles, to encourage and exhort them in their faith, and we hear that "he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith".

Barnabas meets up in Antioch with Paul, himself recently converted from a committed enemy of the new Christians to an equally committed follower of Jesus, who believes himself called to draw the Gentiles to Christ. The pair are instructed by the Church in Jerusalem to collect money from the new Christians in Antioch to support those suffering persecution in Judea, and then we are told that the Holy Spirit commands the church in Antioch to "*set aside Paul and Barnabas for the work to which he has called them.*"

They then set off on an extraordinary missionary journey across Asia Minor, preaching, teaching, healing and converting, speaking out boldly about their faith and arousing both adulation and violent persecution.

They return to Antioch, but before their second journey, fall into a disagreement about John Mark, whom some believe was a relative of Barnabas, who had travelled

with them on their earlier journey, but turned out to be a bit flaky. Paul is not inclined to give him another go, but Barnabas is keen to support John Mark and give him another chance, so they set off separately on their next journeys. By the end of Paul's life, John Mark is with him, so we assume the argument had been resolved, though Barnabas is no longer present – perhaps having already suffered the martyrdom traditionally believed to have taken place in Cyprus.

Our Gospel reading this morning summarized Jesus' final instructions to his disciples in the light of his imminent death: *'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends... You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.'* It would seem that the saint we celebrate today is a prime example of the kind of people Jesus called us to be.

He is generous and caring towards those in need. He encourages or consoles (the same word in Greek can mean both of these) all those around him. He is bold and courageous in sharing the good news of his faith with others and bears fruit in the numbers of people he draws to Christ. He is loyal and prepared to give others a second chance. And he lays down his life for his faith to inspire those friends he has converted to Christianity.

Today we have the joy of baptizing Olive and Asta as they begin their own journey in faith with God. We shall be witnesses as their parents and godparents make promises on their behalf to turn to Christ and to follow him as the way, the truth and life. Perhaps in years to come, they may be reminded of their baptisms on this St Barnabas Day, and of the many ways in which Barnabas sets us a wonderful example of a follower of Jesus. We pray that they too will be known as generous encouragers, as loyal and forgiving, and as people who are not ashamed to speak out boldly about the Christian faith into which they are being baptized today.

After the baptism, we hear the words, *"May God,.. pour upon you the riches of his grace, that within the company of Christ's pilgrim people, you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit, and come to the inheritance of the saints in glory."*

May they, with St Barnabas, share in the joy and glory offered to those who follow Christ. Amen.