

Barnabas: Acts 11: 19 – 30, John 15: 12 - 17

Today, we pause to reflect on the life and witness of Barnabas.

He doesn't always stand in the spotlight—unlike Peter with his bold preaching, or Paul with his missionary journeys and letters. Yet Barnabas quietly shaped the early church in powerful and lasting ways. Without him, the movement of the gospel into the wider world might have unfolded very differently.

What about Barnabas? What does it mean for us to become people like him—encouragers, true friends of God, and friends of others?

The story begins in a time of difficulty. The early Church is under pressure. Following the death of one of its first leaders, persecution forces many believers to scatter. But they don't stay silent. As they go, they carry the message of Jesus with them—planting seeds of faith far beyond Jerusalem.

Some of these scattered believers start speaking not only to fellow Jews, but also to Gentiles—outsiders to the traditional faith community. This was something new, something daring. It happened in Antioch—a diverse, multicultural city far from Jerusalem.

Then something remarkable occurred: people believed. The Spirit was moving. A new and vibrant Christian community began to form in this unlikely place. Word of this unexpected development reached the Church in Jerusalem. They needed someone they could trust to go and see what was happening. They sent Barnabas.

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, what he found wasn't confusion or disorder—it was grace. He saw God at work. He witnessed lives being changed, hearts turning to Christ. Barnabas affirmed what he saw, he was such a great encourager, That encouragement bore fruit. More and more people came to faith. The Church in Antioch grew—not just in numbers, but in depth and maturity. He encouraged the believers to remain faithful, stay rooted in God's love, and continue growing together in grace.

But Barnabas didn't just build up the crowd. He also believed in individuals.

As the community expanded, Barnabas recognized that the work was too much for one person. He went to find Saul—the former persecutor of the Church, now living quietly in Tarsus. Most were still unsure about him. Barnabas saw something more. He saw potential. He brought Saul to Antioch—as a partner in ministry, to grow, serve, and lead.

That decision changed Saul's life—and changed the direction of the Church. From this partnership came the first great missionary movement of Christianity. Together, Barnabas and Saul would take the gospel to new regions and new people, crossing cultural and spiritual boundaries for the sake of Christ.

This is what real Christian love looks like.

So, what about us?

We live in a time that often pulls us in the opposite direction. A world that criticizes more than it encourages. Yet we are called to be people like Barnabas—people who reflect the heart of Jesus.

To be a Barnabas today is to see not just what is, but what could be—through the power of grace. It is to speak life into doubt, offer hope in hardship, and release others into the mission of God. Are we looking for signs of God's grace in unexpected places? Is our encouragement rooted not just in kindness, but in faith and in the Spirit?

Barnabas may not have written a gospel or led a dramatic miracle. But his life mattered deeply. Without Barnabas, we might never have heard of Paul. Antioch might never have become the Church's first great missionary hub. The movement of Jesus might have stayed smaller, more inward, more afraid.

But he was faithful. He was generous. He was Spirit-filled. He was an encourager. And he was a sender. May we follow in his footsteps. May we love as Christ has loved us. And may we, too, be known as sons and daughters of encouragement—faithful, mission-hearted, and full of grace.

Amen.