

BGO Sermon for 8-14-16 – God’s Story, My Story, Our Story: Barnabas
Acts passages, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (NLT), John 14:22-27 (Message)

We’re continuing with a series of “getting to know the Pastor” sermons, as I share some of my story with you, while connecting my life with the lives of people from the Bible, because when you get down to it, all of our lives are part of the bigger picture, that bigger story of God’s Love toward all of creation.

As Amy & I have been sharing our stories, it’s been a blessing to hear your stories, and I’ve appreciated hearing about your hopes and dreams for our church families, and some of your hopes for my ministry here. PASTOR PARISH.

At a meeting at a previous church, one of the members said that as their pastor they wanted me to be their quarterback, leading them toward the goal. Little did I know that what she really wanted was to be the head coach, calling all the plays from the sidelines.

But at least she was speaking my language; with apologies to my bride Amy & all the other Cub fans out there, FOOTBALL is the game, or at least, football is MY game. After all, I grew up in Geneseo, where even the band kids learn to cross body block. And not just that, I grew up during the football team’s 72-game winning streak; I’m one of the few people who can say they’ve had a national hall of fame coach... almost flunk them out of driver’s ed.

In my role as pastor, while I can & do lead as quarterback, & I have to say I’m best at it when I let our Heavenly Father be the head coach, with the Holy Spirit sending in the plays, my most natural position...is cheerleader. I feel my best ministry is in supporting and encouraging you: working to flesh out the mission God has for you individually & for our church family, helping in getting those ministries started, then rejoicing with you in your victories and building up your spirits when the results aren’t as promising. Don’t we all need that friend to walk beside us, that encourager we know is on our side? So with that, let’s take a look at one of the Bible’s best cheerleaders: Barnabas.

Barnabas isn’t a name given to boys much anymore. Barney Fife & Barney Rubble pretty much killed the name off here in the US, though it shows up in other countries. at the college we stayed at in England the Spiritual Formation professor was named Barnabas Palfry; doesn’t that sound British?

But did you know that for our Bible cheerleader, Barnabas was a nickname? We read in Acts 4 his given name was Joseph, but the apostles called him Barnabas, which in Hebrew means “Son of Encouragement.”

Isn't that a cool nickname? Wouldn't you like to be around a person so good at building you up it was like they were encouragement personified? Wouldn't it be great to be that yourself?

Maybe Barnabas can encourage us even today - by showing us how to do it.

The 1st thing we find Barnabas doing to encourage others is meeting their physical needs. The book of Acts records that Barnabas ***sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.*** This not only encouraged the people who were struggling financially, it encouraged the apostles, helping them see their message of Christ's sacrificial love was getting through. And it encouraged the other Christ-followers to be generous as well.

Of course, we encourage others every time we give our tithes and offerings; a good portion of that gift goes to help those in need, nearby and around the world. But we also can give that kind of encouragement on a more personal level.

When Amy & I combined our households, some of the most important things I kept were the personal gifts: items made or given by former parishioners.

& I remember those who gave things like deer sausage from the year's hunt, or pie they baked with the berries from their garden.

Are there things like that you can do for others? Oh, that's preaching, not hinting.

That's where a lot of people, & a lot of Christians, will stop in being an encourager: giving, providing in times of need, but staying on the surface, not going deeper. That wasn't enough for Barnabas.

Maybe the best example of this was the involvement Barnabas had in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Maybe you never realized this, but looking at scripture, despite Paul's later success, his first attempt at ministry really could be seen as a colossal failure.

After his life-changing experience on the Damascus Road,

he begins proclaiming Christ as the promised Messiah,

but with his history as a killer of Christ followers, he meets disbelief of his conversion by many of the believers, and anger at his bold preaching from the Jews.

So Paul flees from Damascus to Jerusalem, and the believers there are just as suspicious of him.

After yet another attempt on his life, the brothers there pack him up & send him back to his hometown of Tarsus with his tail between his legs.

Barnabas had already been part of Paul's story in Jerusalem, as we read in Acts 9. He saw something in Paul then, & testified to Paul's conversion & Paul's faith, standing with him & for him: a good example of putting in a good word for someone. But for Paul to have the ministry God designed for him to have, he needed more. Acts 11 tells us that Barnabas was in the midst of an incredibly successful mission, being an encourager to the new Antioch believers; yet the Holy Spirit prodded him, bringing to his mind the intense young man he'd met in Jerusalem. So Barnabas enters into Paul's life again, not just sending 4 him, but seeking him out, calling him back into ministry. And as you read more of the Book of Acts, you find that Barabas & Paul become partners in mutual mission, traveling together on life's journey, where eventually the mentor steps back to let Paul take the lead.

And that involvement, that encouragement, isn't all just happy-talk. Barnabas holds Paul accountable, disagreeing with Paul when he thinks Paul is wrong. It even comes to a parting of the ways, as we see in Acts 15, when Barnabas the encourager sticks up for John Mark, just as he had for Paul those many years before.

In being that involved in Paul's life, Barnabas didn't just strengthen Paul's ministry, the influence and encouragement he showed made a change in Paul, helping Paul to pass on encouragement to others.

We see that in so many of Paul's letters,

like the encouraging words he wrote to the believers in Thessalonica:

For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

Encourage each other, build each other up: that's the answer for us here today.

But it's not enough just providing physically or just a good word on a Sunday. We need to be involved in each other's lives, emotionally, relationally & spiritually. Look at the people around you, brothers & sisters in Christ. What would it mean if we talked with each other about how we're doing in being more like Jesus: our prayer, our study, our worship? And what about if we talked about how we are sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, like in our mission statement? What if we went that extra step like Barnabas did, seeking out people to encourage in their lives and in their ministry? Can you imagine how that would change our church, and our communities?

So folks, I'm going to be encouraging you in my ministry here
to really speak into other people's lives: to share about our faith,
to tell the night-and-day difference Christ has made for us,
to invite people to be part of our church family
& more importantly, to be part of God's family.

And I'm praying that through the power of the Holy Spirit,
God will enable **me** to not just preach that in the pulpit, but model it in my life.
After all, it's the Holy Spirit that Jesus said would be our Friend, our guide,
to remind us of all the things Christ has told us,
to give us power to keep Christ's words of instruction,
and to give us the words of Good News to speak.

I said at the beginning that my natural position spiritually is Cheerleader;
but when I played football back in the day, my position on the field was center.
You know what the center does, don't you? He gets the ball moving.
So I'm going to call a play here to start us off, help us move closer to the goal line.
And for that, I need to have the kids come up front.

OK, you guys are going to be my quarterbacks.

You know what a quarterback does? He hands the ball off.
So I'm going to give you a ball, you hand it off to someone out there,
then come back & get another, until everyone in the church has one.
OK? Ready, Set, GO!

Everybody got one? Good! Now, this play is what's called an END-AROUND.
It means you don't keep this! The end here it the person you give this too –
a neighbor, co-worker, somebody at the restaurant after church, kid down the street.
And when you hand it off, tell them something about your life of faith:
the change Christ had made, the peace you receive,
or maybe how coming to church here makes a difference for you.
Let that be the first step – the first down –
in living a life deeply involved in the life and faith of others.

Folks, I don't think I need to point out how much this world needs Good News;
needs a word of hope; needs us to live as Sons of Encouragement, shining for Christ!
It can seem like a loveless, sightless world out there, where all we hear is the bad.
But changing one person's life can change the world, at least our little corner of it.
Look what Barnabas did for Paul, & because of that, look at all that changed.

In it all, in our encouraging and being encouraged,
we need to remember that it's God who brings the power, the change,
& it's Christ who has overcome the world & all that would try to steal
our joy & peace; all that would discourage us.

It's worth repeating: *Christ died for us so that,*

whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever.

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.