

+ In the name of the Father of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate the festival of St Barnabas, Apostle and Martyr. As we worship together today it is good to be reminded of this saint of the early Church, one who worked tirelessly for the upbuilding of the gospel of the Lord and the strengthening of the communities gathered as the body of Christ. Barnabas was an apostle of Jesus Christ who in the wake of Pentecost joined the Christian mission led by Peter and Paul. Barnabas was originally named Joseph, a Jewish Levite from Cyprus. His Greek name was Barnabas, which means 'the encourager.' We learn most about him from the Acts of the Apostles, with some reference in Paul's letters. Barnabas had come to faith early in the apostolic era, within a decade of Jesus' death and resurrection. Barnabas sold a field and donated the money to the work of the apostles. (Acts 4.36-37) He grew in prominence in the ministry, being sent from the church in Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria (Acts 11.22) to investigate report of people from Cyprus and Cyrene who were boldly proclaiming Jesus to the gentiles after Stephen's stoning and death. The text calls Barnabas a 'good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.' (Acts 11.24)

Along with Paul, whom Barnabas carefully introduced to the new believers in Antioch following his former persecution of the church and personal conversion, Barnabas brought many people to faith. Because of the efforts of Barnabas and Paul, it was at Antioch the believers were first called Christians. Barnabas was known as a prophet and teacher, and appropriately he is the patron saint of our own theological college here in Adelaide.

Barnabas and Paul made a mighty team of evangelists. They caused many to believe in Jesus, and they caused much rebellion among the Jews because of their bold preaching. (Acts 13.42-47) As their message was deflected and rejected by many Jewish leaders, so many ordinary people, Jews and gentiles alike, heard and were convinced. In Lystra in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Barnabas and Paul were named gods – Barnabas was called Zeus and Paul Hermes, and the priests wanted to sacrifice to them, so convincing were their words. (Acts 14.11-13)

These two were strong personalities. They took on the divisive issue of circumcision and argued for the cause of the gentiles. (Acts 15.1-5ff.) They parted company over a strong disagreement between them over choice of companions in their ongoing journey, following the circumcision debate in Jerusalem. (Acts 15.36-40) This marked the beginning of Paul's second journey. Paul went on with Silas and Barnabas with John Mark. Barnabas is not mentioned again in Acts. Paul berates him in his Letter to the Galatians, saying that in Antioch he was swayed by those Jews from Jerusalem who separated themselves from the gentile converts. (Gal 2.11-13) Church tradition reports him martyred for the faith in Cyprus around the year 60 CE.

As most Adelaide clergy, I was trained for ordained ministry at St Barnabas Theological College. The patron saint's theme of 'encouragement' certainly applies to all who undergo this training, which is a time of much testing and certainly some journeying through the valley of doubt. My first experience with an Anglican church was St Barnabas at Croydon, so this saint has been part of my path in ministry for some time. I currently serve as a lecturer at St Barnabas College, which is a great privilege for me as I reflect on my own training in the college. I usually teach New Testament Greek. I would never have believed I would teach at the college where I used to study.

When I was preparing for ordination, St Barnabas was located in the ecumenical campus of the Adelaide College of Divinity in Brooklyn Park, affiliated with Flinders University. The ecumenical consortium included the Catholic Theological College and the Uniting College. Classes were much larger than they are now that St Barnabas operates separately, and the discussion was lively and exciting. In the time after I was ordained, St Barnabas College and the Catholic Theological College left Brooklyn Park. The Catholics went to Thebarton and are part of the Australian Catholic University. St Barnabas moved to temporary accommodation in Hindmarsh. The college diminished substantially in size and capacity to deliver services to students. This coincided with a move in university education to more online access. Now St Barnabas is located in North Adelaide in the same building as the Diocesan office. The college is now affiliated with

Charles Sturt University and numbers among several campuses which offer theological education across Australia. The current principal is the Rev'd Dr Cathy Thomson.

The campus is small but well equipped with the technology to access teaching material online. The library is very good for a campus as small as St Barnabas. The library is largely resourced from a huge donation of theology books from an anonymous donor in the time of the former archbishop, Jeffrey Driver. Materials for most lectures are accessed online through the CSU library, as is the way for all the mainstream universities in our era. Students have learning services available when they need it, at whatever hour they access. Whilst this level of access to learning benefits the culture and needs of Australian society in 2021, there are certainly not the same opportunities for social activities as there used to be in universities. St Barnabas College tries very hard to maintain a level of social interaction, but it is like trying to swim against the tide. Higher education has changed and has changed for good. Theological education is part of that change, and the church will receive the outcomes of those changes in due course as new ministers emerge from a very different educational culture.

As we reflect on one of the great saints of the apostolic era, it is timely to remember that the church in this day is in need of much encouragement. The model of Barnabas, a powerful evangelist and courageous defender of the faith, can bring us faith in a time of apathy and disillusionment in the Anglican Church in Australia. It is possible to turn things around, change trajectory, bring life back into the dry bones of the church. I was not ordained into the church to settle back and be a passive witness to its decline. The example of St Barnabas and the teaching of the theological college which bears his name did not prepare me to expect decline, but to believe in the life of the Holy Spirit which is the engine that drives the church.

At St Luke's we have spent the last three years actively engaging in mission action planning, activating our desire to respond to the Holy Spirit and give our very best to the church to enable it to grow and flourish. We have achieved so much in these three years. We have moved in thinking beyond the 'bums on seats' theory to really looking

outwards and beyond ourselves as a church. We know deeply in our hearts that if we don't put the effort in now then there will not be a tomorrow for the next generation of St Luke's. So many people here have honoured the life and work of St Barnabas. You know who you are. You have faithfully served the poor and attended to the suffering. You have been generous in service. You keep coming to this church and seek any opportunity to serve. So many of you have taken up the challenge of the mission action plan priorities. Our church plant is transforming into a beautiful natural space. The community are coming to us more than they have before. And we are daring for more. We are dreaming for a future imbued by the Holy Spirit, a future where our space may be a hub of life in Modbury where people come and go and find a presence of God to quiet their souls and nourish their life.

So, thank you for being here and sharing who you are in God's company as you worship and pray. Thank you for your part in the future that is unfolding, and I pray that you will enter into it with hope and faith.

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. May we be inspired by Barnabas to believe that we also who are few in number may be the bearers of a news that is so good people simply must hear it. The Lord set apart Barnabas for his gifts and sent him out, fully equipped in the Holy Spirit to do the work of Jesus, healing, proclaiming, freely giving of the peace that he had been given to those who would hear. May the Lord bless us likewise as we engage in the work ahead, when we pray, when we come before him. May we be encouraged by the example of Barnabas today and as we look toward a vision that unites us, and a mission that serves the people among whom we are set, faithful to the Lord Jesus who died for us and who is our life and our salvation. Amen.