

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Thursday, June 11, 2026

Saint Barnabas

Solemn Eucharist

5:30 pm

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Canon Carl Turner

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Be Encouraged!

“The mission of the church is to be the Spirit-filled agency through which genuine advance signs of new creation are brought to birth. What God accomplished in Jesus’ resurrection is to be actualized again and again in acts of justice and mercy;” ^[1] Words of the great biblical scholar N.T. Wright.

Barnabas, like St. Paul, is not one of the twelve disciples called by Jesus but his life was so changed by the power of Jesus’ resurrection that, like Paul, he was afforded the title *Apostle*. (see Acts 14:14).

The name Barnabas should give us a clue as to why we are all called to live mission-shaped lives. He appears in the Acts of the Apostles as a devoted follower of Christ, who set an example to the other disciples: We read, *“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.”* (Acts 4:36-37)

First, we should notice that Barnabas was a Levite; he was formed in the practice of the worship of the Temple and how worship is at the heart of the life of faith. Secondly, he was a Jew from Cyprus and knew something of the diversity of the world in which he grew up which may also explain why he and Paul were chosen to be apostles to the gentiles. Thirdly, he gave to the community from his own resources; you could say that he is the patron saint of Christian stewardship – of giving to the church’s mission through his treasure and not simply through his time or talent.

Barnabas was not afraid to speak his mind, and it was Barnabas who brought the newly-converted Saul to the apostles in Jerusalem, even though they were afraid of him, and it was Barnabas who accompanied Paul on many of his missionary journeys. It was through the mission of Barnabas to Antioch that the disciples there were first given the name *Christians*. (see Acts 11:19-26). He was clearly a powerful presence for, in Lystra, following the healing of a man crippled from birth, the people said *“The gods have come down to us in human form!”* (see Acts 14:8-18) and they named Barnabas Zeus, and Paul, Hermes. The irony of this was not lost on Barnabas, for he knew that he had to proclaim the good news that the *one* true God had, indeed, come down from heaven in human form – and that his name was not Zeus, but Jesus – the image of the invisible God.

Challenge was something that Barnabas was well used to; indeed, he and Paul had such a disagreement over who should accompany them on a missionary journey that they had to go their separate ways, with Barnabas taking Mark with him to Cyprus. (see Acts 15:36-41)

But possibly the most important intervention that Barnabas made in the New Testament Church was to speak up for the Gentile followers of Jesus at the first Council at Jerusalem that resulted in the first Apostolic Letter affirming that there was no need for Gentiles to follow Jewish Law.

My friends, we are called to be sons and daughters of encouragement; to bear witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus that welcomes all; to make a difference not just with our time and talent, but also to ‘put our money where our mouth is;’ and become signs of that new creation breaking into our world: “*What God accomplished in Jesus’ resurrection is to be actualized again and again in acts of justice and mercy.*”

References

- 1 “*The Early Christians and the Mission of God: The Michael Green Memorial Lecture*” N.T. Wright, given at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, December 9, 1919
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