

Scripture and Message
18 July 2021

Scripture: Acts 9:26-28; 11:25-30; 12:25 NRSV

Prayer for Illumination: Guiding God, send your Holy Spirit upon the reading of your Word that it may serve to show us the path of life and lead us into your presence where there is fullness of joy. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading

Acts 9:26-28 NRSV.

When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

Acts 11:25-30 NRSV.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.” At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea; this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 12:25 NRSV.

Then after completing their mission Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Message: The Church in Antioch – Mentoring Leadership

Friends, last week we began to talk about leadership in the early church. We looked at how the Apostles in the Jerusalem church had delegated some of the leadership needs in their expanding multi-cultural, multi-lingual church to the new people. They shared their leadership with congregants that spoke a different language in their homes and came from a different cultural background. One of the verses in the Scripture we read last week listed the names of the men that were consecrated by the Apostles to this new leadership role, and I pointed out that one of the men, was Stephan the first Christian martyr. It is during the stoning of Stephen that we are first introduced to Saul, who is described as a young man.

You all know the story of Saul’s journey down the Damascus road. (Retell story) How he was so filled with righteous indignation against the Christians that he resolved to root them out. And how Jesus appeared to him in a vision and in that instant Saul did a 180 and became as zealously Christian as he had earlier been against them. So, Saul uses all his youthful exuberance to start proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah in Damascus with the expected results. He ended up needing to sneak out of town by being lowered in a basket over the city walls before he is killed. Not having any pressing plans, he returns to Jerusalem where we read this morning, "Back in Jerusalem [Saul] tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. They didn’t trust him one bit. **Then Barnabas took him under his wing.**" This is the important part. “He introduced him to the apostles and stood up for him, told them how Saul had seen and spoken to the Master on the

Damascus Road and how in Damascus itself he had laid his life on the line with his bold preaching in Jesus' name." (Acts 9:26-27, Message)

Barnabus took Saul under his wing. Barnabus mentored Saul. Mentoring is a way of leading that I want to explore with you this morning. Again, there is nothing new here. Mentoring can be found in human history as far back as you care to explore. In the Bible, Moses mentored Joshua. Eli mentored Samuel. Elijah mentored Elisha. Jesus mentored the disciples. And Barnabus mentors Saul. He introduces him to the Apostles and vouches for him, and "After that he was accepted as one of them, going in and out of Jerusalem with no questions asked, uninhibited as he preached in the Master's name." (Acts 9:28, Message)

Back when I was a baby pastor, it was still the tradition for an older and wiser pastor to mentor you and teach you what you need to know to *really* be a pastor. By the time I was ordained it was no longer a formal part of our ordination process, but it was still an informal piece. I was lucky enough to be mentored by Rev. Carl Johnson. He taught me to play cribbage on the floor of annual conference. He taught me that annual conference was important because that was where you went to build up your relationships with old friends and to make new friends; the business of annual conference was incidental to the business of relationship building. He taught me that a pastor should always carry a pocketknife, because they come in handy in so many situations. A pocketknife is good for opening boxes. It can help to strip wires when the sound system isn't working. You can use one as a crude screwdriver or when you need to pull off the hinges on the youth room door that has somehow, mysteriously, gotten locked again. He gave me this one when I was ordained an elder. Of course, Carl taught me many other things about being a pastor that were, perhaps, more serious. Most of which I learned through watching and listening to him lead the church to which we were both appointed.

This idea of mentoring leadership is strong within the church, and the relationship between Saul and Barnabus was fruitful. As you know, Saul's story doesn't stop with his return to Jerusalem. Oh no, Saul is so contentious it isn't too long before he is in the same spot he found himself in in Damascus. He riled up enough people that they were trying to kill him, **again**. So, the church packed him up and sent him home to his parents in Tarsus. And there in Tarsus Saul sat.

We know nothing about the time Saul was in Tarsus. He didn't start a church there. He didn't rile up people enough for them to try and kill him. Perhaps because it was his home; he often identifies himself as Saul (or Paul) of Tarsus. Perhaps the people of Tarsus knew what kind of firebrand Saul was and ignored him. It is easy for people to ignore you and refuse to acknowledge the changes you've made in yourself in your hometown. And there Saul sat for at least ten years. Yes, you heard that correctly. From the internal evidence of the Scriptures, we know that Saul stayed in Tarsus, probably in his parents' house, learning his tentmaking skills, for **at least 10 years** before Barnabus decides to go and get him.

We read, "Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. He found him and brought him back to Antioch. They were there a whole year, meeting with the church and teaching a lot of people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were for the first time called Christians." (Acts 11:25-26, Message) Here is where I believe the real mentoring took place. Here in Antioch where "the disciples were for the first time called Christians." (Acts 11:26, Message) Why? Because Saul was there for full year teaching and preaching and no one tried to kill him or run him out of town. It has got to be Barnabus's influence. Within weeks of preaching and teaching in Damascus and Jerusalem, Saul manages to rile up enough people he needs to leave town in a hurry, but not in Antioch with Barnabus as his mentor and coach. In Antioch Saul eventually leaves, but only to go on mission trips. And Saul is always welcomed back.

But Robyn, you just got done telling us Saul was in Tarsus for 10 years. Yes, but we have no record of Paul preaching or trying to start a church there. And even Jesus found it hard to preach in his hometown. And I know that Saul's basic character has not changed because once he goes out on the mission field, he is run out of town after town. In one case, the people are so riled they follow him to the next town to get rid of him! *But here*

with Barnabus something is different. Somehow Barnabus can lead Saul in a different way and together they change the world.

What can we learn from Barnabus and Saul? How do we mentor people in our church? Personally, I really love the idea of taking people under your wing. I love it when the church has a tradition of matching up visitors with long timers who take them under their wing and introduce them around. Inviting and involving the new folk, even some of the not so new folk, in the life of the church outside of the worship service. As Carl mentored me about annual conference, it's all about relationship. *Right now, of course, we are only cautiously inviting people to attend our services in person, but nothing is keeping us from reaching out to members of the congregation and community whom we haven't seen since COVID forced us all to close our doors last spring. Perhaps it is time to rebuild some of those relationships; perhaps it is time to reach out to the people who are still worried and fearful and ask how they are doing and if there is anything they need from their church. Perhaps it is time to remember an old friend or a new friend and take them under your wing as together we learn together how to be in ministry again here in Dryden.*

Barnabus's actual name was Joseph from Cyrene. He was given the name Barnabus which means son of encouragement. Encouragers are good mentors, perhaps it is time to start encouraging people once again. Encouraging people can mean to coach or mentor a person into using the gifts they have been given by God. Barnabus knew how to do this. Saul was a Pharisee. A student of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. As a disciple of the rabbi and a Pharisee, Saul would have known the Scriptures better than I do. He would have the knowledge and perhaps the gift of teaching. He definitely had the gift of arguing. But Barnabus encouraged him to teach and share his knowledge of the Scriptures with the church at Antioch. Barnabus may have even used the age-old structure of teaching with Saul as a mostly silent assistant – teaching a second time with Saul as a co-teacher – teaching a third time with Saul as the main teacher. Show how/ Do it together/ You do it.

After Saul and Barnabus taught for a year in Antioch, they were sent on a mission of mercy to Jerusalem. This was their first, but not their last mission trip together. This trip was not to plant churches, but to raise funds for the coming famine.

“It was about this same time that some prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem. One of them named Agabus stood up one day and, prompted by the Spirit, warned that a severe famine was about to devastate the country. (The famine eventually came during the rule of Claudius.) So the disciples decided that each of them would send whatever they could to their fellow Christians in Judea to help out. They sent Barnabas and Saul to deliver the collection to the leaders in Jerusalem.” (Acts 11:27-30, Message)

Again, I want to point out to you, Saul with Barnabus managed to stay in Jerusalem through some tumultuous events (you can read the incredible story in Acts 12) without needing to flee the city. In fact, when they left Jerusalem, they took another youth with them, John Mark. **And this is the last part of mentoring as leadership I want to point out. Once you have been in a good mentoring relationship, you multiply the blessing by becoming a mentor to someone else.** Mark is just the first of many people Saul mentors during his life, next week we will be starting to look at the letters sent to two more of the people Saul mentors, Timothy and Titus. The joy of leadership through mentoring is in the relationships and the multiplying of blessings as the best practices are passed from one generation to the next. Let us learn from this and commit to encouraging those we take under our wing to spread their wings as we all learn to use the gifts God has blessed us with. Amen.