

## 542 Worthy of the Vocation

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4.1-3, KJV).

As we reflected upon last week, in our getting along with others, and especially with “them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6.10b, KJV), effort is required by all! – as we see from those verses quoted above from Ephesians Chapter 4. We are to “walk worthy of our vocation” – living lives which confirm our Christian faith and profession: meekness, lowliness, longsuffering, forbearance, love, all wrapped up in the desire to preserve unity and peace. This reminds us of words in Jesus’ own heartfelt prayer – “that they may be one, as we [are] ... that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves ... that thou shouldest keep them from the evil ... Sanctify them through thy truth ...” (from John 17.11-17, (22-23)).

We are given glimpses of such a life “worthy of its vocation” as lived by dear Barnabas, whose “Saints’ Day” falls each year on 11<sup>th</sup> June. (Incidentally, he and others are thus described as “Saints” in the Book of Common Prayer (retained from Roman Catholic tradition), this title denoting that the Church has granted them an elevated spiritual status, akin to an MBE or such like, thus placing them above the rest of us. This is quite mistaken – for ALL believers in Christ are saints, right now, already! – as a visit to “saints” in your Concordance will clearly demonstrate; so we can bear our Christ-won status of sainthood with humility, wonder and gratitude).

Now Saul of Tarsus was a proverbial “tricky customer”, who suddenly swapped sides, from vehement hostility to Christ to prominent proclamation of Christ (eg., Acts 9.1-22); or perhaps, as the disciples, the saints, in Jerusalem understandably wondered, was this all “a cunning plot”? (9.26).

Our first encounter with Joses is in Acts 4.36, to which we might respond with “Who??”, but then we read that this Joses “by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), a Levite, [and] of the country of Cyprus”. “Barnabas” was thus his nickname, bestowed upon him by the others after experiencing the true nature of his character and life. This “son of consolation” comforts; he is there, solid, reliable, wise, seeing, humble, a fine “visual

aid” indeed of his Christian vocation. He is also generous, selling some land and handing all the money over for the apostles to use as they see fit (in contrast to poor Ananias and Sapphira in Acts Chapter 5).

In response to the disciples’ suspicion over Saul, we read in Acts 9.27, “But Barnabas took him (Saul), and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way (a lovely phrase, with the Lord being “in the way” in both senses!), and how he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus”. Barnabas’ speaking up for Saul was enough to convince, and Saul was brought on board – and we thank the Lord that he was!

In Acts 11, “the son of consolation” was in action again, being sent from Jerusalem more than 300 miles north to Antioch to check out all the talk of the Gospel being preached to, and received by, “the Grecians” – Gentiles no less! Barnabas duly saw “the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (from 11.19-23). “For he (Barnabas) was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith ... (11.24a). Then, remembering Saul’s calling and gifts, Barnabas searched him out in Tarsus (a further 100 miles) and “brought him unto Antioch”, for the teaching of “much people” (from vv.25-26).

Then in Acts 13.1-4a, by divine appointment, “Barnabas and Saul” were “sent forth”. Soon though Saul had become both “Paul” and “the chief speaker” in all the adventures that were to follow (13.9; 14.12b). Sadly, Paul and Barnabas later had a falling-out over John Mark - “they departed asunder one from the other”, and we hear no more of Barnabas (15.36-41). Here was one occasion when Barnabas stood up to Paul, presumably for what he felt were good reasons; we can only say with regret that occasionally “these things happen”, evidently even among the best of us.

We thank the Lord for the life and ministry of Barnabas, “the son of consolation”, our fellow saint: may we too, by God’s grace, “walk worthy of our vocation”. We can finish with the Prayer Book Collect for “Saint Barnabas the Apostle”, set annually for June 11<sup>th</sup> - “O Lord God Almighty, who didst endue thy holy Apostle Barnabas with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost: Leave us not, we beseech thee, destitute of thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them always to thy honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen”.

