**Encouraging like Barnabas**

***36****Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”),****37****sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.*

*Acts 4:36-37*

This is the first time that Barnabas appears in the Bible. He seems to have already built up a reputation for offering people support and helping them to grow in confidence, accompanying them and encouraging them to perhaps go further with things than they might otherwise have felt able. Here we see him offering a financial encouragement to the Church although this is perhaps not the encouragement which we usually think of when we remember Barnabas. I have often thought that it would be wonderful to be known as someone who is encouraging, it is an important gift because it helps others to fulfil their potential.

**What are the gifts and characteristics which people might see in you?**

**What are the gifts you see in the people around you?**

We see Barnabas’s gift of encouragement in action when we read the account of Paul’s experiences following his conversion. In Acts 9 we can read how, when Paul came to Jerusalem and everyone else was afraid of what he might do considering all that he had done in the past, Barnabas was the one who brought him before the apostles. Barnabas stood by Paul’s side and vouched for him as someone who had responded to meeting the risen Jesus.

**Have we had times when we have really appreciated the moral support of somebody else? Have we had times to be thankful for when someone else has spoken up on our behalf? Are we good at seeing when others need such support from us and doing our best to provide it?**

As the early Christians were persecuted, they ended up being scattered across a wide area and they took the news of the gospel with them. A growing church was planted in Antioch and the apostles sent Barnabas to encourage them (Acts 11:22-24). Barnabas had the bright idea of getting Paul involved with teaching and nurturing the young church there.

**Would Paul have become so involved without Barnabas? Is there anyone who we can encourage to become more involved in what God is doing in the world?**

Later, Barnabas and Paul were sent out by the church at Antioch to take the gospel to new places and to fulfil their mission to the gentiles (Acts 13:2-3). God did a lot of good work through Barnabas and Paul but after a while their partnership came to an end. Barnabas had someone else he wanted to include and encourage in his cousin John Mark (Acts 15:36-41). Paul disagreed and they went their separate ways each continuing to spread the gospel. There is no suggestion that their friendship was broken and perhaps this was just another time when God multiplied the work which was being done by separating people out into different groups.

**Can disagreements be a good thing if dealt with well?**

There are more things which Barnabas did and more details which can be discovered about him by reading Acts and the epistles, but what we see from the description above is that he was someone who was faithful to God, willing to give others the benefit of the doubt and good at working in partnership. Barnabas made a difference not only through what he said and did but also by being there, alongside others, supporting and encouraging them. The encouragement Barnabas gave was a significant contribution to the good news being spread so widely.

**What encouragement or challenge does the story of Barnabas give to us for our lives?**