

St Barnabas Day 11 June 2023

Bountiful God, giver of all gifts, who poured your Spirit upon your servant Barnabas and gave him grace to encourage others: help us, by his example, to be generous in our judgements and unselfish in our service; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Sermon

Reputation: Lessons from St Barnabas

Following West Ham's Europa Conference League triumph on Thursday evening the standing and status of their manager David Moyes has somewhat shifted. Known in recent years primarily for his unsuccessful spell as manager of Manchester United his reputation has been not only restored but enhanced. From being a 'never quite made it at the very top' manager whatever happens in the rest of his career he'll go down as a legendary manager in West Ham's history.

In tennis Novak Djokovic has a reputation for thriving on pressure, whilst in snooker poor old Jimmy White had/has a reputation for choking under pressure.

Our politicians have reputations and their reputations, what people believe about them, what opinions they have about them has a bearing on their popularity and trust... and ultimately their success.

What's our reputation as Christians and the Church?

What is my reputation? Your reputation? How are you and I seen and known by the various people in our lives? And what about the church in the Parish here in Tidenham? What's our reputation? How are we known? Who do people say we are?

When I was appointed here as Vicar we talked a lot about our reputation as a Christian community. As a then outsider looking in we were known as being very eclectic with a variety of different backgrounds and traditions. We were known for taking seriously ministry to children and young people. We were known for good music. We were known for allowing lay people to do things. There were some lovely things we were known for. However, we also had a reputation by some in the community as people who didn't always get on very well with each other. Tidenham, Tutshill Chase divides. We were known by some as factious and even unwelcoming. Not being interested in Sedbury and Beachley was another thing comment... rightly or wrongly.

What is our reputation now as God's people in this place? What opinions do the community have about us as the church? Who do people say we are?

Reputation effects mission

It's a really interesting and important question to ask individually and corporately. For several weeks now we have talked about the call that we have to share our faith, to be witnesses in word and behaviour to the saving love and power of God in Christ.

If our reputation is poor then like a politician or football manager who's name is mud the effectiveness and cut through of our message will be vastly diminished. Our message and our witness will be like a noisy gong or a clanging symbol... incongruent.

As God's people are we known for being distinctive, loving, God fearing, prayerful, serving, outward looking, welcoming, caring, encouraging? Whether we are OR NOT has and will have a great effect on our witness and effectiveness in mission.

The Bible says a lot about reputation

Read through the Scriptures and reputation is a big theme...

The letters of the New Testament say a lot about what God's people were known as and known for in particular places. The Corinthians were known as being immature, divided yet open spiritually. The church at Philippi was known for being generous supporting Paul's ministry.

Jesus himself talked about his reputation... "who do people say that I am?" Matthew 16:13-16
And Jesus recognised the effect of his follower's reputation when he said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35
In the 2nd Century the Christian leader Tertullian heard people saying "see how these Christians love one another." And he recognised the effect it had.

Today is St Barnabas Day... and we can learn so much from him when it comes to reputation.

The Reputation of Barnabas

1. He was known to be full of the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Acts says Barnabas was a "good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith" (Acts 11:24). What a fabulous reputation!

Through Barnabas' ministry with Paul, the believers in Antioch learned to be like Jesus in their words, actions and overall conduct. In fact, Barnabas and Paul were so much like Christ, that early "Christ-followers" were called Christians for the first time in Antioch. (See Acts 11:26.) Christ of course means anointed one. Barnabas was so full of the Holy Spirit that people saw Christ in him.

Barnabas also displayed the gifts of God's Spirit. Indeed, Barnabas' real name was Joseph but such was his reputation that the disciples nicknamed him Barnabas, which means the son of encouragement. (See Acts 4:36.) Imagine being given a new name... or a nickname associated with spiritual gifts.

Are we known for being full of the Holy Spirit? Are we known for being 'Christ like' anointed ones? Are we known for the gifts and grace of God in our lives? Are we known for our passion for holiness, passion for the things of God, passion for justice, passion for the poor, passion for community, passion for life in all its fullness, passion for prayer, passion for the Scriptures, passion for worship, passion for service?

Sisters and brothers in the Lord... Barnabas had his human weaknesses which we can read about in the New Testament... and he needed the 'umph' of the Holy Spirit. So do we! When we are filled with the Spirit and are transformed by Christ people will notice!

2. Barnabas... son of encouragement by name and nature.

Barnabas encouraged and mentored, helped and supported.

It was Barnabas who played a key role in making the church of the time accept this so called new convert Paul. In Acts 9:26-28 we read how Paul, was granted acceptance in the church...

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he (Paul) tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

Barnabas was the man who helped facilitate Paul's acceptance into the Christian community. He had eyes to see what God was doing in someone else and was open to the Spirit so much so that the mighty Christian persecutor Paul was accepted and nurtured and released in ministry and mission.

Barnabas also prepared Mark for ministry. Barnabas did such a good job with Mark that Paul later asked Timothy to take Mark to him, since he had become useful to him in ministry. (See Colossians 4:10; Acts 13:5; 15:37-39; 2 Timothy 4:10.)

Whilst he did preach and did do some 'up front' ministry Barnabas often worked behind the scenes facilitating and making things happen. Barnabas is a reminder that some of the most effective evangelism, discipleship and missionary work is NOT up front preaching and teaching but behind the scenes one to one... taking someone under your wing, mentoring, encouraging, supporting, nurturing, noticing, connecting, praying... fanning the flame of God's Spirit in others. What gifts of God do we see amongst us that need encouraging... fanning into flame?

We all have a calling to build each other up... Eph 4:29, 1 Thess 5:11 to be the people wants us to be as the church and in the world.

3. Barnabas was a person of generosity.

He was generous in how he saw others... like Paul... in giving them time and the benefit of the doubt.

He was generous using his gifts and skills for the Lord.

And Barnabas was generous when it came to money and possessions. Barnabas sold a piece of land and "brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37). And to avoid burdening the churches by asking them for support, he worked to support himself while in ministry. (See 1 Corinthians 9:6.)

When a great famine broke out in Jerusalem and the believers chose to send aid through Barnabas and Paul. This choice signified how much the believers trusted Barnabas and Paul and that they would deliver the aid as intended. (See Acts 11:27-30).

Barnabas. What a reputation!

Spirit filled, Christ like, faith filled.

Encourager, mentor, supporter.

Generous with his heart, his time and his money.

Trustworthy.

What is YOUR reputation?

What is OUR reputation?

By the grace and power of the Spirit and our co-operation may we have a reputation that bears witness to Christ, brings others to flourishing in faith and brings glory to God.