

SERMON February 8, 2009
“The Barnabas Factor” Lynn Renne

The Lectionary reading from the Old Testament is from the prophet Isaiah.
(READ)

I know verses 28-31 very well – I was about 14 and sitting in the back seat of the car as Dad was driving us from Wisconsin to New York City where he, a minister, was to give a talk at a meeting. It was a 2 day drive.

Now Dad decided that he wanted to say Isaiah 40: 28 -31 by memory at some point during the talk, so he practiced it out loud the whole way to New York City. Each time he would start it over, I'd say to myself “Oh no, not again!”

But – as a result, I know these words well! And I love them. Every time I hear “Have you not known.. have you not heard...” I think of my dad and hear his voice. Let me read these 3 verses over again.

²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

The prophet Isaiah is proclaiming in his beautifully poetic way that God gives power and strength – God helps us get up off the ground as if we had wings as strong as eagle's wings! With God we are able to run and walk and not get tired or fall down. God makes a difference in our lives! I like to think of God as the great encourager – wanting to get us up, giving us courage to go on!

These last two weeks have found us feeling weary, powerless –exhausted. Powerless in the face of nature and its challenge in spite of its beauty.

Weary and weak in the face of a tragic death within our church family.
Looking to days and weeks of clean up in yards and healing in hearts.

The Bible is full of words about courage and encouragement: Hear words from Joshua in his days of challenge:

“ Have I not commanded you be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

The word Courage comes from the Latin for heart – Cor...

To EN courage means to give courage to a heart... to Inspire with courage, spirit, hope; to increase the confidence of and help go forward.

“To feel the fear and still be able to face pain, danger or trouble.”

This is what the “The Cowardly Lion “ in the Wizard of Oz wanted !

When I knew I would be preaching on Boy Scout Sunday, I immediately thought of all the qualities the scouts strive for, and could had selected any of them. Scouts try to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

I decided to think about the over riding quality that is part of the scouting program, which to me is something that we all need – and that is encouragement ... they work to be the best that they can be in many situations.

In scouting is found encouragement from parents and peers – a survey showed that a large percentage of scouts feel encouraged by other scouts or adult leaders.

We all need encouragement at some point. We all fail (fall).fail (fall) .and need the hope that no matter how many times we fail/fall down, we can get up again.

At these times we can picture God kneeling right in front of us – listening to him encouraging us “Come on! You can do it! Reach out to me, stretch out

your hand, look at me. I'll help you and together we'll get up and go on”

I thought of all the words Jesus said throughout his ministry: Sometime look through the gospels and see them: Get up and walk! Don't be afraid; With God all things are possible; Don't worry about your life, what you will drink, eat, wear... Turn the other cheek.... Love your enemies...

This morning I got up early – the sun was rising through the trees, the snow and ice was gone from our yard, showing green grass, and birds were back to singing. The smell of hyacinths brought over by dear neighbors and placed on the table by my laptop was incredible. I knew that God is still very present in the world despite every human challenge we have faced.

Let me tell you about a man in the Bible who carried the spirit of encouragement into the infant church.

There is a man who was nicknamed The Encourager by those in the early church because of his personality and actions. His name was Barnabus – which translates to “The Son of Encouragement”

We don't hear very much about him, - he appears briefly in the book of Acts which describes the birth and growth of the church. But he was a huge player in the growth of the Christian church in its earliest days.

Let me tell you what we DO know about him....

The early Christians shared the things they owned ... Barnabas sold a field, and brought the money to the apostles to they could give it to the poor.

Then comes an even more amazing thing. There was a man called Saul who was known for persecuting many Christians, responsible for many deaths. A time came when Saul had a powerful meeting up with God, and the experience showed him he was wrong; he changed and wanted to help the Christians out. Many people thought he was lying and that this was just a way to infiltrate the new church. Saul, now called Paul, was not immediately brought into the Christian family, much less as a leader!

But then the encourager, Barnabas, came on the scene. Barnabas was charged with bringing the faith to the Gentiles, (the foreigners-those who

weren't Jews) and we can imagine him saying to himself "I need someone like Saul/Paul. I need to go and get him to help me." He was giving him a chance.

Barnabas spotted potential in Saul, and brought him into the game in a big way. Saul, now Paul, turned out to be so good in his new role, that Barnabas stepped into his shadow and let him lead!

The first two missionaries were Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas was happy to see Paul use his gifts. Think what would have happened / or not happened to the infant Christian church if Barnabus hadn't taken a chance with him and given him courage to go forward with him. Many of the churches would never have begun, and there may have been no Christianity as we know it.

The Barnabas Factor is the title of a book, the whole name being The Barnabas Factor: Realizing your Encouragement Potential
Written because of the inspiration of his life.

Like Barnabas, we all have an opportunity and responsibility to encourage others, to not only comfort and console, but to urge on and challenge each other to make a difference in someone's life. Throughout Scripture encouragement is highly valued and celebrated by God.

In Hebrews: we read "encourage one another to love and good deeds."
Paul, in his letters to Timothy and Titus, repeatedly writes not only to encourage them, but also to encourage them to encourage others. Leaders are told to encourage those they are leading and those being led, their leaders.
Parents are told to encourage their children.

How?

It is also the deeper level of encouragement – the opportunity to speak into someone's life, to help them grow into what they are at their best. To believe in them and in their potential, that they **can** become the best that they can be.

An author has written that you encourage people as you stop discouraging them, stop tearing them down. He said he thinks that it takes about seven affirmations to make up for one ill-conceived discouragement or criticism.

We can encourage by example;

We can encourage by simple words –

My daughter recently told me that (well – out of all the “words of wisdom” I imparted...) her favorite words of mine as she was growing up were “You can do it!” Sometimes those 4 words are all one needs to hear to bring out the strength inside and the remembering that “yes! I can”

She’ll call even now that she’s an adult with children, just to hear me say “You can do it!”

We can encourage by letting others know we have confidence in them ,
That we believe in them, that we trust them to make right decisions,

That we are praying for them.

Will you be a Barnabas this week ??? Will you see potential in all those you meet, and do something to help them on the road to meeting that potential?

Is there someone God has placed in your life who needs a Barnabas?

The past two weeks have been truly been filled with the living with the spirit of the Barnabas Factor:

Our community and this church have been the embodiment of the spirit of encouragement.... We have been called on to give each other courage to get through the days with no electricity ... those with warm and lit homes have taken in those with cold dark homes and shared food warmth.

We have been called on to give each other courage to get through a week of dealing with a tragic and unexplainable death in our church family.

Life is wonderfully exciting But it can be tough. Most of us know this only too well.

Few skate by on good looks, perfect health and a large trust fund.

We all face headaches, heart aches, and hassles in the course of our lives. Temptations to sin are always before us.

So we need to encourage each other – to comfort and console and challenge and applaud and urge forward. To encourage each other to do the right thing.

To give another one strength to draw from when he or she is weak, weary and can't see the way clearly. I'll close with the story of Two Horses.

Two Horses

Just up the road from my home is a field, with two horses in it.
From a distance, each looks like every other horse.
But if you stop your car, or are walking by,
you will notice something quite amazing.
Looking into the eyes of one horse will disclose that he is blind.
His owner has chosen not to have him put down,
but has made a good home for him. This alone is amazing.
If nearby and listening, you will hear the sound of a bell.
Looking around for the source of the sound,
you will see that it comes from the smaller horse in the field.
Attached to her halter is a small bell. It lets her blind friend know where she is,
so he can follow her.
As you stand and watch these two friends,
you'll see how she is always checking on him,
and that he will listen for her bell and then
slowly walk to where she is, trusting that
she will not lead him astray. When she turns to the
shelter of the barn each evening, she stops
occasionally and looks back, making sure her
friend isn't too far behind to hear the bell.
Like the owners of these two horses,
God does not throw us away just because
we are not perfect or because we have problems
or challenges. He watches over us and even brings
others into our lives to help us when we are in need.
Sometimes we are the blind horse being guided by
the little ringing bell of those who God places in our lives.

Other times we are the guide horse, helping others see.

Good friends are like thisYou don't always see them,
but you know they are always there. Please listen for my bell and I'll
listen for yours.

"Be kinder than necessary,
for everyone you meet is
fighting some kind of battle".