

We celebrated Pentecost a few weeks ago so the Christian church is now, as it were, a few weeks old.

And our readings today give us a glimpse of the amazing vibrancy of that early community of believers.

We talk sometimes of the energy and enthusiasm of new converts
And we've seen something of that here recently haven't we
(naming no names!)

But the church we've heard about in our readings was nearly **all** new converts!

They couldn't get enough of Jesus and fellowship with one another
They met together every day in the temple to hear the Apostles' stories of Jesus –
and to share their own stories
They shared meals together in each other's homes
They shared everything they had
They even sold property to be able to give to fellow believers in need.

No wonder Luke could write that "the Lord added to their number **daily** those who were being saved"

It's in the middle of all this new life that we meet Barnabas –
whose turn it is today in our sermons on Bible characters.

Luke introduces him first as Joseph,
(They all seemed to have two names in those days!)
Luke tells us that he was a Levite –the family from which the temple priests were chosen
That he came from Cyprus
And that he's well enough known to the Apostles for them to have given him a nick-name -
Barnabas ('son of encouragement')

It's possible that Barnabas had come up to Jerusalem from Cyprus just for the feast of Pentecost
And that he had been converted by Peter's message at the festival

If so, then the Holy Spirit had got to work on him amazingly quickly!
Which is possible!
And still happens today –
Overnight changes do still happen when people come to faith in Jesus!

But it takes a little while for someone to be given a nick-name!
So it's more likely that Barnabas was one of the 120 disciples who were present in the upper room when the Spirit was given

In fact, the upper room **may** have belonged to his uncle!

We're told later in Acts that Barnabas was the cousin of John Mark
And there's a tradition that the upper room was in the house of John Mark's parents.

We're told a lot about Barnabas in the book of Acts -

Not least, that he was 'good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith' (Acts 11:24)

'full of the Holy Spirit'

That's what I'd like to focus on this morning

And I'd like us to look at four incidents which show what that meant for Barnabas
I'd like to look especially at how the Holy Spirit **motivated** and **guided** him

I hope that will give us an idea of how **we** should expect the Holy Spirit to guide **us**.

First, Luke tells us that Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles –

no doubt to be used to meet the needs of poor Christians

As a Jew, Barnabas would have been very familiar with the idea of tithing –

Giving a tenth of your income to the work of God

But what he did here went far beyond tithing.

There was no command in the Scriptures to sell possessions and give the proceeds to the poor.

The Apostles didn't tell him to do it

He didn't hear a voice from the Holy Spirit telling him to sell and give

He wasn't given a prophetic word or a special sign

Nor is there any suggestion that he spent a long time praying over whether this was what God wanted him to do.

It seems to have been much simpler than that

Barnabas saw a need amongst his fellow believers

He was in a position to do something about that need

And just he **did** what he could do!

Being full of the Holy Spirit didn't mean that he was given special guidance

It meant that his heart was **open** to the needs of others –

and **free** from holding tight to his possessions.

Writing years later Paul lists the fruit that the Holy Spirit should bring in someone's life

And among that fruit is **love** and **kindness**,

It's that fruit of the Holy Spirit that we see in Barnabas.

The second incident occurred when Barnabas first met the Apostle Paul –
or Saul as he was called at the time.

In Acts 9 we read that some time after Saul was converted on the Damascus road he went back to Jerusalem and tried to meet the leaders of the church there.

Most of the Christians that Saul approached were extremely wary of him

Hadn't he just recently launched a violent persecution against them?

Had he really changed so completely?

But Barnabas, full of the Holy Spirit, **gave Saul time to tell his story.**
And, as he listened, Barnabas was convinced that Saul really was a new person
So, Luke tells us that “Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles”
And told the apostles everything that had happened to Saul.

Barnabas took quite a risk in doing that
It needed courage and faith
But there’s no indication that Barnabas had any special word from God to guide him
There’s no suggestion that he prayed about what to do.

Again, it seems much simpler.
He met a man who needed help,
and trusted his own judgement of character.
He was in a position to make the introduction that Saul needed
And, out of kindness, he just did it

Years later Saul, by then Paul, wrote
“The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, for . . . we have the mind of Christ” 1 Cor 2:15-16.

Barnabas might not have express it quite like that at the time
But being full of the Holy Spirit meant that he had ‘the mind of Christ’
And he just did what he believed to be the right thing.

In our second reading just now we heard of another occasion where we see Barnabus motivated and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Because of persecution, Christians went out from Jerusalem taking the Good News of Jesus with them
One place they ended up was the great city of Antioch –
And soon a lively church sprang up there among the gentile population

The church leaders in Jerusalem hear about it and want to check it all out
so they send Barnabas
Someone they can trust – someone who lives by the Spirit

Barnabas is over-joyed to see what God is doing among the gentiles.
Lots of them are coming to faith
It’s very exciting

But he then does a surprising thing
He leaves Antioch and goes on a long journey to Tarsus to look for Saul,
When he finds him, he brings him back to Antioch to help with the work.

Why did he do that?
Maybe he realized that the church in Antioch would benefit from Paul’s ability as a teacher
Maybe he thought that Paul would benefit from being involved in the Antioch church.

But again, Barnabas seems to have had no visions,
heard no voices,
received no signs.
Nor does he even suggest that God **told** him to do it

He seems simply to have had a good idea
Been in a position to do something about it
And gone ahead and acted on it.

Was he guided by the Holy Spirit?
Most certainly yes!
The rest of the New Testament is proof of that!

So was that the **only** way that Barnabas experienced the Spirit's guidance?
Just to know that the Holy Spirit was in him
And to trust and act on the promptings of his heart and mind?

Well, it does seem to have been the norm.
But it was not the whole story.

Luke writes that after Barnabas and Saul have been working in Antioch for some time
And during an extended time of prayer and fasting,
'the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have
called them.'

It seems that they **did** hear a voice of guidance, probably a word of prophecy
So this, at last, looks like 'spiritual' guidance
Maybe the sort of guidance that we would like when we're not sure what to do!

But as we read Acts we see that this was not the norm for Barnabas
And it won't be the norm for us.

There may be occasions when the Holy Spirit guides us through a special word or sign
But we shouldn't expect that.
And, certainly, we shouldn't hold back from doing good
or acting on a good idea
whilst waiting for a special sign or word.

Rather, we should trust the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds
Trust that we really have been given the mind of Christ.

So that when we see a need, and are able to do something about it,
we don't hold back.

When we see an opportunity for God that we can take,
we take it

When we have a good idea that's within our grasp,
we act on it -

trusting God

and showing ourselves to be like Barnabas – 'full of the Holy Spirit'

Amen
1527 words