

Strength in diversity.

Acts 11: 19-30 Our strength is in diversity

“For he (Barnabas) was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they associated with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christians’”.

In today’s reading from Acts Barnabas and Paul begin to move centre stage. Two personalities who could not have been more different - more unlike. Perhaps they were always destined for a falling out. The New Testament, to its credit, never spares us of the details of both their progress and their problems. We have an honest account of how the same friends fell in and out with each other. (Acts 15:36-41)

Paul and Barnabas travelled far and wide, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. On one journey they took a young man called Mark (Barnabas’ cousin) with them. This travelling ministry was tough and dangerous; they literally were risking their lives. Part way through, Mark turned back and abandoned the mission.

When again Paul and Barnabas were about to set out, Barnabas suggested taking Mark along, but Paul was set against it, saying that Mark was not dependable, not to be trusted. But Barnabas, true to form, wanted to give Mark a second chance and so he and Mark went off on one journey, while Paul took Silas and went on another.

For Paul the mission and the message of Jesus Christ was everything and nothing and no one was to get in its way. On the other hand, Barnabas though an able enough evangelist, his real talents lay in his generosity, his encouragement, his compassion – always willing to give a person the benefit of a second chance.

Can either of these men boast over the other? I think probably not. God has chosen to build a community of diverse people - his aim is not that we should all try to be like Paul or all try to become like Barnabas. God’s aim is that when one is weak, the other will be strong; when the strength of one makes him vulnerable to a corresponding weakness, the other be there with the balancing virtue.

God's plan is that we do not envy or try to emulate each other, but rejoice in the wisdom of the Spirit who creates and uses us according to our personalities and gifts and yes even our failures and foibles.

Every blessing, stay safe, Linda