

Rev. Dan Welch Easter 2 4-7-24 Text: Acts 4:32-37

People get nicknames for lots of different reasons. Some come by a physical trait, like “Shorty” for height or “Red” for hair color. A nickname could be a shortened form of a longer given name, one that’s easier to say: Bart for Bartholomew; Beth for Elizabeth. Sometimes, you can’t be sure where a nickname came from. It seems quite a few guys have the nickname “Bud.” Not sure where that comes from, but it’s fairly common.

The same is true for people who lived in biblical days. The disciple Simon was given another name: Peter. It meant “the Rock,” for the solid confession he made. One day Jesus asked who His disciples believed He was, and Simon said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Great answer, solid as a rock. Now he’s known as Peter. On this day, the Second Sunday of Easter, we remember that we’ve given a nickname to someone who didn’t believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. We now call him Doubting Thomas.

In the First Reading from Acts, we come across another nickname: Barnabas. The man’s name is Joseph, but he’s called Barnabas. Why? Because of what he so often did. He was an encourager. He built people up. He gave of himself to take care of others. He supported those who were all alone. He was a “son of encouragement.” That’s what Barnabas means.

What a great nickname! Barnabas, the encourager. Now that’s a nickname all of us could have. All of us can be encouragers, just like Joseph from Cyprus.

So how did Joseph become Barnabas, the encourager? Look at Acts 4:33, and you’ll see the key to his nickname: “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” The name Barnabas is a resurrection nickname. He becomes the encourager because of the power of Jesus’ resurrection. He encourages people because Jesus’ resurrection has brought grace to his life. But Jesus’ resurrection is not just a name changer; it’s also a *life* changer. Easter makes a difference!

When Jesus rose from the dead, people’s lives were changed. Peter denies Jesus when things get tough. On the night when Jesus is betrayed, our Lord ends up on trial. He’s headed to the cross. Peter is watching all this play out. Three times people accuse him of being one of Jesus’ disciples. Three times he says, “I’m not.” No rock-solid confession that night. He is disgraced by denial. But later, Jesus, alive, body glorified, meets Peter on a beach and restores him. Changed by his meeting with the risen Jesus, Peter rises up to become a great apostle in the Early Church. Same for Thomas. He doesn’t believe. “You’ve got to show me,” he says. And Jesus does just that. “Here, put your hand into the

nail marks, Thomas.” Everything changes. He believes. He, too, becomes a great apostle in the Early Church. He, too, is changed by the resurrection.

We don’t know if Barnabas ever personally saw Jesus risen from the dead. But it doesn’t matter. The message of Jesus’ resurrection the apostles proclaimed was powerful and life changing too. It changed Barnabas. Jesus, the risen Lord, came to him in that message, and Joseph of Cyprus became Barnabas, the encourager.

The same is true for us. The message of Jesus’ resurrection changes us.

Are you struggling with a sin? Jesus is risen from the dead! Your life is changed because whatever that sin is, you are forgiven.

Are you doubting God’s love? Jesus is risen from the dead! Doubt becomes faith strong once again, because His death happened because He loves you, and the resurrection *proves* that was His plan.

Are you easily angered? Jesus is risen from the dead! Relax and be calm in His peace because He lives to take care of whatever upsets you.

Are you afraid of getting sick, losing your job, losing someone you love? Jesus is risen from the dead! He is with you always, no matter what.

Are you weak and heavy laden, feeling burned out? Jesus is risen from the dead! He listens to the prayers you take to Him.

Are you complaining and jealous of what others have and you don’t? Jesus is risen from the dead! Contentment comes from the Lord, who lives to grant you rich supply.

Are you trying not even to think about your death? Jesus is risen from the dead! You, too, will rise, as will everyone who confesses Him as did Peter, as did Thomas.

Are you a complainer; crabby and negative? Jesus is risen from the dead! He can change you to be a Barnabas; an encourager.

Yes, you can be a Barnabas too. Just look at what Barnabas did. He had some property, a field. We don’t know how big it was. We don’t know how much he got for it. We don’t know if he had other fields. It doesn’t matter. What’s important is that he did not consider that field as his own. No, he knew it was God’s gift to him to use wisely. So, he sold the field and brought the money to the apostles. What was the money used for? For those in need in the church. He saw that some people didn’t have enough. He sold the field. He gave the money.

You can guess what the result was: the people in need were encouraged. Someone cared for them. Someone knew what they were going through and wanted to help. Someone was willing to give away what he had to make sure they had enough.

You know who else was encouraged? Those in the church who watched Barnabas do this. They were encouraged that someone would be so generous. They saw that what they had wasn't their own either but was the Lord's gift to them. They gave too. In that church, at that time, none of the members was in need. Barnabas, the encourager, changed by the resurrected Jesus, helped make that happen.

Do you see what the resurrection looks like? It's the grace and power of Jesus working in Joseph's life, so he'd get a resurrection nickname: the son of encouragement.

It's not the only time Barnabas was an encourager. The apostle Paul started many of the churches after Jesus rose from the dead. He wrote many books of the New Testament: *Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. But he was not always such a passionate proclaimer of Jesus' resurrection. No, at one time he persecuted the church, and he was good at it. He arrested people who were Christians. He was happy when some of the early believers were put to death because of their faith. But then he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Everything changed. The persecutor became the proclaimer. He wanted everyone to believe in Jesus. But not everyone believed he had changed. Many were still afraid of him.

You know who helped pave the way for Paul to be accepted by the other disciples? Barnabas. He spoke up for Paul. He vouched for him and traveled with him. He put his life and reputation on the line for Paul. His words encouraged Paul. That encouragement could have been one of the reasons Paul became the apostle who started so many churches, who took the powerful message of Jesus' resurrection throughout the ancient world. Barnabas, the encourager.

Here we are today. We've heard the powerful message of God's grace. Jesus is risen from the dead. He is at work in our lives. He's changing us. We can each be a modern-day Barnabas.

What does that look like today? Barnabas spoke up for Paul. The words he used were words of encouragement. We too, can speak encouraging words to others. Like: "Your smile at work is so wonderful to see." "You did excellent work on that assignment." "Thanks for being a teacher." "No, I won't help you bully her." "Loser? No way. You're God's unique creation." "You are loved by Jesus." "Are you feeling left out? Come on over and join us!"

One way to be an encourager is to use words that are a gift to someone else, to build people up, to let them know someone cares, that Jesus cares.

Barnabas also gave to those in need. It still happens in the church today. When you give your offering or a special gift it encourages others. It encourages those who are helped by your donations, and it can encourage others around you as they see you giving, and they are inspired to give or keep giving also. All to further God's kingdom on earth.

Joseph of Cyprus is given a resurrection nickname: Barnabas, the "son of encouragement." It's a good nickname for us, too, when we encourage others with words that build up and by the generosity we show. But we need to remember one more nickname today—for Jesus. Jesus is given many names: Savior, Good Shepherd, Redeemer, Reconciler, Lord, Prince of Peace. But today we've heard another name for Jesus: Life Changer. Jesus' resurrection gives grace and power to change lives into "Barnabases," encouragers with words and generosity.

Jesus *is* risen from the dead. Jesus *is* the Life Changer. Easter definitely makes a difference. Amen.