

July 22

Scriptures: Read Acts 8 & 9

Key Verse: “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles…” (Acts 9:27)

Overview

Have you heard any “discouraging words” lately? Sometimes those words come non-verbally from the circumstances you face. Sometimes they’re the well-meaning but unnecessary comments from a friend. Other times they are self-accusing views from the depths of your own pool of poor self-esteem. But whatever their source, discouraging words are never welcome. We’d all rather choose to hear encouraging words.

In the barrage of insults, anger, and open hostility facing the early church, there was great need for an encouraging word now and then. Enter a Cypriot named Joseph, the personification of encouragement. In fact, the apostles called him “Barnabas” (which means “Son of Encouragement” 4:36). He was an outstanding player in the early drama of the Christian church.

He not only helped get the fledgling church onto its feet financially (4:37), but he was an encouragement in several other ways. The most valuable thing he did, however, was champion the cause of that volatile and “dangerous” convert, Saul of Tarsus.

Just after his Damascus-road experience, Saul went to Jerusalem to join the disciples. Predictably, they wanted nothing to do with him. After all, he was “public enemy number one” as far as the church was concerned. There was understandable suspicion about the sincerity of his alleged conversion. Barnabas, however, believed in Saul. He put his own good reputation on the line and vouched for him before the Jerusalem leadership. He had a discerning spirit and a willingness to act on what his heart told him about raw material. A few years later, by now a companion of “the apostle Paul”, he did the same for a young, untried man called “John Mark” (even if it meant separating from Paul’s missionary travels—15:36-39).

Think of it. If it hadn’t been for Barnabas, we wouldn’t have the Gospel of Mark, nor the writings of St. Paul. It’s amazing what an encouraging word can do!

Prayer

Dear Father, once again we ask for grace; this time so that we may exercise the gift of encouragement. Today and always may we lift up the discouraged by leading them gently to the One who said, “Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”