

## Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

12th June 2005

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Readings:

Genesis 18: 1-15

Psalms 116: 1-2 page 346

Romans 5: 1--11

Matthew 9: 35 - 10: 8;

### Hard Graft!

If you had a friend who had been a vocal critic of the Church, who asked to come and see what we are like; What would you do?

Avoid the issue?

Make an excuse?

**OR**

Pray for the courage and wisdom to bring her or him along?

I thank Brian McKinlay for mentioning Barnabas last week, because he was in a similar situation with Paul. Paul had been a persecutor of the Church but had been wonderfully converted to Christ Jesus. Paul had been accepted by Ananias and the Church in Damascus but when he decided (because his life was in danger from the Jews) to go to Jerusalem he found the believers in Jerusalem were afraid of him. So Barnabas took Paul and explained to the apostles all about Paul's conversion.

He overcame his own fear to include Paul.

I mention all this because yesterday was St Barnabas and his actions seem to fit with the theme of today about rising above our own fears and seeking to do things in the strength and guidance of God's Spirit! To be a labourer in the vineyard to bring in God's harvest.

Barnabas —

a Jewish Levite

A native of Cyprus

was called Joseph

but the apostles gave him the name Barnabas — which means son of encouragement or son of consolation. he also, we hear, gave generously to the work of the early Christian movement.

But the point is that Barnabas overcomes his own fear and anxiety about Paul and about how the apostles will receive him to introduce him to them.

Is there a lesson in this for us — I think there is.

that is, that God enables us by the presence and power of the Spirit to rise above our own negativity.

Brian emphasized Barnabas' encouragement and I think that is what is needed at all levels of life and not only in the Church — but especially in the Church!

ENCOURAGEMENT...

I think it is one of the things that my friends from the USA do well — probably better than Australians.

I was aware when I saw some spectacular dancing on TV yesterday that instead of saying "Isn't that Great!"

I said: "Not Bad!"

I want to further illustrate my point about God's sustaining, guiding and enabling presence by mentioning St Paul.

[quoting a bit from HV Morton... partly saying that Paul did not have the gospels to read while he was on his missionary journeys. They had not yet been written!]

Barnabas and Paul — interesting and complex characters enabled in their quest by the ongoing presence of God's Spirit.

That brings me back to Paul's words in his letter to the Romans — because he is able to speak from experience when he says that it is by faith that we have peace with God — that quiet still centre of our being even though the world is going crazy around us.  
and he speaks of:

suffering producing endurance

endurance producing character

character producing hope

hope is there because of God's love in our hearts because of the presence of the Spirit.

Suffering can be destructive — embitter and damage us

**BUT**

It can also be a great resource... a time of personal and spiritual growth enabling us to take the lessons learned and apply them in helping, caring for and guiding others. Parents guide their children using the resources gained in their own struggles.

In Abraham and Sarah's story, all the hope for a future generation seemed gone. We can, like Abraham and Sarah, try to create God's will by doing it our way — we can become cynical and negative — and that is the nature of Sarah's response "Ha Ha, that's not really going to happen!"

But she finds that God's purpose can be realized in spite of our poor human negativity. Her laughter becomes the laughter of affirmation and joy of realisation.

And God laughs with Sarah!

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Possibly if we were among the apostles when Jesus sent them out warning of hardship and deprivation of being like sheep among wolves; warned to beware of opposition we might say:  
TOO HARD! NOT ME!

But if we are reassured that indeed God is with us, The Spirit enables and inspires in the ups and downs of life, and if we find among our Christian family the encouragement of that same Spirit at work in others around us, then we too can move from the laughter of negativity to the laughter of joy. We too can grow through suffering and struggle; we too can be labourers in a tough vineyard, with God's spirit to uphold us.