

ENCOURAGED BY CONNECTING

Acts 9:22-28

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WATCH/LISTEN: fbcjc.org/sermon/encouraged-encouraging-others-through-connecting

Someone told me at the door last Sunday that this is perfect timing for this sermon series, “Encouraged.” In February we have lots of cloudy days, lots of flu and colds—in short, the winter blahs. We all need encouragement.

In this morning’s text, we see once again how Barnabas lived up to his name, Son of Encouragement. Saul of Tarsus, who had terrorized the early Christians, had been converted to Christ. Later, his name was changed to Paul. For the sake of clarity, we’ll call him Paul. He had been in Damascus, boldly sharing Christ in the synagogues. Resistance to his message was so strong there was an attempt on his life. He escaped and came to Jerusalem, but the believers there were terrified. They thought it was a trap. They didn’t trust him.

Enter Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement. He takes Paul directly to the apostles and vouches for him. Barnabas had “street cred” with the apostles and he loaned some of that to Paul. He put his stamp of approval on Paul. The apostles basically said, “If Barnabas says he’s OK, he’s OK.” And scripture says, “Paul went in and out among them and preached boldly...” (v. 27). Now I ask you: would we even be here today if Paul had not carried out his ministry? And that begs the question: Would we be here today without Barnabas acting as a connector? So forever after this encouraging, connecting work Barnabas did that day, whenever Paul saw lives coming to Christ and churches growing, Barnabas was there. He had a part in it.

But consider this from the other direction. Paul had to be willing to accept Barnabas’ help. I am guessing Paul was a proud man who’d rather do it by himself. He was more willing to give help than to receive it. But a sign of maturity is being willing to accept encouragement and help from others.

How did Barnabas know to go out on a limb for Paul? He no doubt was gifted in seeing good in others. Encouragement is one of the spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12. But I don’t believe we have to possess that gift to be an encourager. Everyone can be an encourager.

Regarding Barnabas, in the vernacular of our day, he had a strength-based bias. He believed everybody is good at something. That’s true of you, your family, our church and our city. Barnabas saw potential in everyone. Now you knew that some way or other this sermon was going to find a way to mention last week’s Super Bowl, right? I kept hearing during the game that one of the things which makes a great player or coach is that he makes everyone around him better. What a great way to describe an encourager. The gift of helping others flourish.

Isn’t that what Christ does for us? Allows us to flourish—John 10:10. Life abundant, overflowing. Isn’t this imbedded in our church’s tagline? “See what love can do.”

Since the recent movie about Fred Rogers came out last year, lots of Mr. Rogers quotes have surfaced. To me, the most powerful is this one: "Is there somebody who loved you into existence, who loved you so much that you became who you are right now? Who taught you how to love, who accepted you exactly as you are? Who told you that you are special and gave you the foundation and confidence that you would not have had if they hadn't been in your life?"

I think about my eighth birthday when I received my first Bible. Since it was New Year's Eve, my family had neighbors over. Out of the blue, our neighbor Betty Marshall asked me, "Doyle, have you ever thought about being a minister?" Why did she ask that? Where did that come from? An encourager and connector.

I think of Gene Milligan, my Vo Ag teacher and FFA adviser. For no reason I knew of, he gave me a speech to memorize and give to the chapter at our next meeting. And he started me in public speaking. How did he know? An encourager and connector. I think of Fred Harner, my pastor when I was in high school, staying at our little country church an extra year to disciple me after my call to preach. Why did he do that? An encourager and connector.

Someone out there needs your encouragement today. Say this prayer with me. Lord, thank you for those who encourage me. Lord, help me to leave a trail of encouragement everywhere I go. Amen.