

Sermon, April 12, 2015 - Easter 2

## “A Name Change Proposal”

Acts 4:32–35



Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was

distributed to each as any had need.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Blessings to you on this second Sunday of Easter.

Today I would like to propose that we change our name! What would you say if instead of Faith Lutheran Church are called something else? That people will call us for what we do? What would that name be? If not a name, at least a nickname, what would that be?

Do know that in the Scriptures God actually changes people names? He does it based on what they do, or what they are going to do.

The disciple Simon for example, 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” (Mark 16:16). Great answer, solid as a rock. Now he’s known as Peter. The disciples James and John wanted to call down a storm of destruction on a town that didn’t treat Jesus with respect. Their nicknames: Sons of Thunder. 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 Book of Acts we have the story of a man named Joseph whose name the disciples changed to Barnabas. Now why would the disciples rename Joseph to Barnabas? It was 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.

Son of encouragement! What a great nickname! Barnabas, the encourager!

Now, can we change our name to that? Barnabas! Is Barnabas a good name? Imagine that: “People of Encouragement.”

But Barnabas, mmm, I’m not sure we like that name. Some name changes we don’t like, but, perhaps we just need to accept it for who we are, or what we can be and are to be.

Do you know that my name, is Jaime? Yes Jaime (High-me). But most of the time when I say my name I say “Jaime” (Jay-me).

Now, it's an English translation isn't it, except that I would have preferred to use Jaime (High-me) instead. But one day Pastor Kahle took me to the hospital for visitation. Back then pastors needed to register at the front desk, so we did. Pastor Kahle gave his name, then mine. Of course I said my name is Jaime. The receptionist asked how I would spell my name, I said, J A I M E. She said, in Canada we pronounce your name "Jay-me." She said "you are in Canada now, so you have to say Jaime (Jay-me) we don't say Jaime (High-me).

Of course, at first I didn't like, at all! With my revolutionary attitude I said, I'm not changing my name, for no body, I'm who I Am, and that's it. But then I thought, the nurse might be right, after all it is not what I want but what I need to adapt, to live in a Canadian Context, to make things easier for me and those I communicate with, so sure my name is Jaime (Jay-me) that's me! I'm not going to change people's minds, but I can accept the change.

Likewise, we might one day have a change in our name, but another fruit of the resurrection of Christ is actually a new Name, not only because of your baptism, but because the resurrection of Christ grants you a new attitude, the attitude of Barnabas. In other words, because of the resurrections of Christ and what it means to each one of us, we can now be encouragers, just like Joseph from Cyprus. Therefore call me Barnabas. Yes, that's got a wonderful ring to it! Doesn't it?

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, and this change dear friends is radical. That's the radical change I have been meaning we are to experience in our congregation, in our church.

When Jesus rose from the dead, people's lives were changed. Take Peter for example who denies Jesus when things got tough during Jesus trials. Yet He is the first one Jesus calls by name and meets him 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. "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 was because he loves you, and the resurrection *proves* that was his plan.

Are you too 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? 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 of 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 crabby and negative? Jesus is risen from the dead! He can change you to be a Barnabas.

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. 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. 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 is 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.

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.

*Isleys example...*

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," encourages with words and generosity.

Jesus is risen from the dead. Jesus is the life changer. Amen.