

St. Barnabas
Synod Assembly Sermon
Friday, June 11, 2010

[Icon of Barnabas]

Today marks the commemoration of St. Barnabas, whose original name was Joseph. He was renamed Barnabas due to his ability as a preacher. He preached the Good News of Jesus Christ with power that brought encouragement to the people. Bar-means son of, nabas-means encouragement.

He preached that good news to Jews, Hellenists and Greeks. He was the one who went to Tarsus to bring back Saul/Paul. He was the leader of the Antioch church and was held in high regard by St. Luke, quite probably higher regard than Paul. Luke always gives Barnabas the place of honor in his writings, “Barnabas and Saul”. Barnabas and Saul carried relief funds from Antioch to famine stricken Jerusalem. He was a great missionary of the church.

It is little wonder that we used his name when we created Barnabas Uplift. It is a shared ministry of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Muslims and non-governmental agencies. It is a ministry of “nabas”, encouragement—creating economic opportunity, access to health care and substance abuse education.

[Picture of Café]

The church has many ministries of encouragement. There are also those who provide the church with encouragement. I recently had a conversation with a café owner in our synod that provides one example.

I was having one of those long Sundays that synod staff know. I was up early to travel an hour or two. There were multiple worship services and a forum. Ruth and I were looking for a bite to eat before driving to my afternoon commitment of another congregational meeting in another town before driving home.

The morning had not gone particularly well and I was nervous about the afternoon session. We found a small town café that featured a Sunday buffet so we stopped in.

The only ones that were there were the owner, her husband and her daughter so the conversation came quickly and easily. We covered the health of the school system, corn and hog prices, the empty store fronts but also words of optimism about a new business in town.

“We are the one place in town where everyone knows they can gather-even when there are problems. That was true when you had those problems with your congregation a few years ago.”

I thought for a moment. Our congregation was doing quite well. Then it dawned on me. There had been a conflict over 20 years ago. “A few years” has many definitions.

“That was about 20 years ago, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, it was but I want you to know that when your people wouldn’t talk to each other at church, they would come here, drink coffee and I would get them to

talking with each other. Even the detractors would come in and I could eventually get them to talk with the others.”

She continued, “I’ve always seen myself as a bit of a peacemaker in our family and with friends and I guess that’s my role in this town as well. I guess that my little café is kind of a Center for Peace.”

What could be more encouraging than a ministry of peacemaking and hosting a Center for Peace for an entire community.

And what if, what if, the local café’s Center for Peace in our communities was joined by the Lutheran Centers for Peace-our congregations!

[begin roll of [congregational pictures](#)]

Not all of our congregations were able to send us a picture of their center for peace but we do have a sampling from around our synod.

The world is so filled with conflict and seems to be constantly adding more to the list. Peaceful missions to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza are prevented. Political and military unrest throughout the world seems to grow each week. What will North Korea do next? What will happen next in the Middle East? Or Afghanistan? How quickly and how far will greater violence spread?

Natural disasters create turmoil through flood, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes and volcanoes. The human toll is immeasurable.

Human disasters destroy the Gulf Coast and beyond, ending life in the sea and on the shorelines and bringing an end to a lifetime of work by families.

Economic turmoil nationally and internationally creates anxiety and despair. The uncertainty is unbearable for some and hope for a new job sometimes cannot be found.

Our church has known turmoil as well. Are the August decisions by the churchwide assembly a breakthrough for God's justice or are they an intolerable break with our tradition? Some families and some congregations are dividing themselves on this issue while others simply choose to leave, still others give thanks and prepare for ministries of welcome and hospitality. Where is the encouraging word of peace?

There is a peace that passes all human understanding and it only comes through Jesus Christ. And where does He promise to always meet us with this gift of peace? He promises to always be with us whenever we gather to share God's Word and Sacraments in ways so powerful that we cannot fully comprehend but that we experience. Jesus brings His peace each week when you gather as a congregation to hear God's word and receive the Body and Blood of Christ and every time another is baptized into Christ's body.

Jesus is present whenever God's people gather around Word and Sacrament, in congregations but also at synod assemblies and churchwide assemblies and He promises grace that is given fully and that is sufficient for the day, He promises forgiveness that is offered freely to all sinners and faith that is created for all of eternity.

[Hopefully this will take us to the end of the Centers for Peace video]

Jesus Christ gives us a peace that passes all understanding, that heals every wound and pain. Only the Prince of Peace can give that kind of peace.

Horatio Spafford knew that peace. He is the author of the words of the great hymn, “When Peace Like a River.” Here is his story.

[Go to new [video about Spafford’s hymn](#)] [If video doesn’t work-go to next page]

Please rise and join in singing this great hymn, “When Peace Like a River”.

Horatio Spafford story line

Horatio Spafford was born in North Troy, New York on October 20, 1828.

He was a prominent lawyer, a wealthy businessman, a devout Christian and a loving family man.

In 1871, Spafford invested heavily in real estate on Lake Michigan. He lost almost everything in the Great Chicago Fire. October 8, 1871

Around this time Horatio and his wife lost their 4 year old son to Scarlet fever.

1873-- Desiring a rest for his wife and family Horatio planned a trip to England.

He sent Anna and his four daughters ahead on the ship S.S. Villa du Havre. He expected to follow in a few days.

November 22, 1873—The S.S. Villa du Havre, sailing off the coast of Newfoundland, was struck by an English ship...and sank in 12 minutes. After hours of floating in rough seas, Anna was rescued and arriving in Wales, she messaged her husband, “saved alone” 226 lives were lost including the Spafford’s four daughters. Receiving the horrifying news, Spafford left immediately to join his wife. Among the Lost—Annie 11, Maggie 9, Bessie 7, Tanetta 2.

He asked the captain of the ship on which he was sailing to notify him when they approached the area where the Villa du Havre went down. Told that the area was near, Spafford went down into his cabin. And near the scene of his daughters’ tragic deaths, he penned the words... “it is well with my soul.”

With God’s help, Horatio and Anna picked up their broken lives. They pioneered the Spafford Children’s Centre which still cares for more than 30,000 children each year.